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Was She a Wife?

OR,
THE PROOF OF LOVE.

A New York Society Story.

BY RETT WINWOOD,
AUTHOR OF "WIFE OR WIDOW," "A BRIDE AT SIXTEEN," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. AT DEATH'S DOOR.

Loop up her tresses
Escaped from the comb,
Her fair auburn tresses;
Whilst wonderment guesses
Where was her home.

—HOOD.

SHE had made her way to the extreme stern of the boat and stood leaning against the rail-

ing in an abstracted attitude, watching the play of the waves in the morning sunshine as though they fascinated her. There were shadows in the dark-blue eyes and around the drooping lids, and even the poise of the light, lithe figure, thrown slightly forward, betrayed a hopelessness and despondency sad to see in one so young.

In spite of the despair that invested it, the girl's face was strikingly beautiful; the features were mobile and fine, the mouth delicately cut, and the full white throat, in its surpassing fairness, seemed to rise like a column of marble from the fleecy folds of black lace that edged her dress.

She was not unobserved. A face and figure like hers must have attracted attention anywhere. At a little distance stood a stalwart, middle-aged man, tall and soldierly in his bearing, with a pretty young girl leaning upon his arm—Robert Trevlyn and his daughter Gerald. They had noticed the forlorn-looking

stranger when she came on board the boat at Fall River, the evening before, and were now watching her furtively, and making their comments in suppressed voices.

"How sorrowful she looks," murmured Gerald. "Poor thing; she must be in trouble."

Mr. Trevlyn drew a quick breath. He had been more deeply touched by the girl's loveliness and evident despair than he was willing to acknowledge. From the time when she first dawned upon his vision the previous evening until she reappeared with the other passengers, in the early morning light, she had been frequently in his thoughts, both waking and dreaming.

"Could you not venture to speak to her, Gerald?" he said, with suppressed eagerness. "She seems to be quite alone."

"I would rather not, papa. I don't imagine she would like to be intruded upon."

"But," he urged, "the poor child looks so



"HOW SORROWFUL SHE LOOKS," MURMURED GERALDA. "POOR THING; SHE MUST BE IN TROUBLE."

forlorn, all by herself. A friendly word never comes amiss."

Geralda looked up with a swift glance of surprise. As a rule her father was more reticent than herself in the matter of accosting strangers.

"Do you really wish me to make this young girl's acquaintance?" she inquired.

"Oh, no. That is," growing confused in spite of himself, "it occurred to me that you might be of some service to her. Women have such gentle, quiet ways of getting at each other's troubles—that's all."

Meanwhile the object of their regard, quite unaware of the interest and curiosity she had excited, still continued to gaze fixedly at the dancing waves below. All at once she stretched out her arms in a wild way, like a person mutely appealing for mercy, and before any one could interfere, sprang lightly over the railing and disappeared in the cold blue depths that had seemed to allure her so strangely.

Instantly all was confusion. The passengers crowded toward the rail, the women pale and shrieking, the men uttering cries of horror. Robert Trevlyn was one of the first to recover himself. In a moment he had stripped off his coat and leaped into the dark flood in the hope of rescuing the suicide.

Fortunately he was an expert swimmer. Just as the girl rose for the second time he was near enough to clutch her dress, and, after a few frantic efforts, succeeded in drawing her to him. By superhuman exertions he managed to keep both their heads above water until a boat rowed by two fishermen, who happened to be plying their vocation near by, could come up. The would-be suicide lay white and still as a dead woman in his arms, and the action of the waves had coiled round him, like a web, the long, floating tresses of her yellow hair, so that it was even difficult to extricate himself.

Of course the steamer had stopped to pick them up. There was a wild, tremulous hurrah as they were lifted on board, and the passengers crowded round, excited and eager. It was like welcoming the poor, drenched figures back from death itself.

Geralda Trevlyn flung herself on her father's neck with a burst of very womanly tears. The agony and suspense of the last few moments had left her weak as any child.

"Papa, papa!" she cried. "How could you risk your life so rashly? It was dreadful—dreadful!"

For the first time in Geralda's experience he repulsed her.

"Take care. You will smother this poor child, if she is not dead already. Stand aside."

Staggering into the cabin with his dripping burden, he laid her on one of the sofas, and began chafing her hands and temples, quite unmindful of his own condition. He trembled with eagerness and excitement, and had nearly worked himself into a frenzy when at length the poor thing began to exhibit signs of returning consciousness. Her bosom heaved, and a faint quiver stirred the long-lashed lids.

It was at this instant that Geralda, alarmed by her father's strange looks, came a step nearer.

"You are chilled and exhausted, papa," she said. "Oh, take some thought for yourself. You will make yourself ill."

"Hush!" He stopped her with a movement of his head, and turned quickly to his charge. Her eyes were now wide open, and she was looking around in a bewildered way, at the anxious faces gathered near.

"Where am I?" she asked. Then, as recollection returned, she started up, crying piteously:

"My God! Why was I not left to perish? I do not wish to live. It was a cruel hand that brought me back to life and misery."

A half-defiant expression kindled in her eyes as she met Geralda's shocked and reproving looks.

"God will forgive me," she said, beginning to tremble and weep. "He would forgive any one tried and tempted as I have been. Ah, miss, you do not know what suffering is in the world, or how death may often appear a welcome release."

She hid her face in the sofa-cushions, and gave way to a perfect tempest of sobbing. It made Robert Trevlyn writhe and catch his breath, to witness her misery.

"Can't you prevail on the poor child to retire to your state-room and put on dry raiment?" he said, in an undertone, to Geralda. "It pains me to see her exposed to the gaping curiosity of all these people."

Suppressing any reluctance she may have felt, Geralda knelt beside the sofa and gently

passed one arm around the convulsed figure lying there.

"Don't grieve so," she whispered. "I am your friend. It was papa who saved your life, and he did it because he pitied and wished to help you. Do you not believe me?"

The girl lifted her head, glanced searchingly at Geralda, and all at once clung to her with both hands.

"Yes, yes, I believe you," she said.

"What is your name?"

"Leonie," speaking the name slowly, and with some hesitation; "Leonie West."

"Come with me, Leonie. In less than half an hour we shall reach New York. In the meantime you must change your wet clothing, and try to get refreshed."

Not until they were gone did Mr. Trevlyn withdraw to his own state-room to attend to his individual needs. While the girl was present he had been unconscious of any one's wants save hers alone. After bathing and refreshing himself, he sat down in the outer cabin and again gave himself up to thoughts of the beautiful stranger.

"Who is she?" he said, "and what tempted her to the crime of self-destruction? Poor thing! I feel very deeply interested in her already."

As soon as the boat reached the dock Leonie reappeared, leaning upon Geralda's arm. She looked sad, but inexpressibly lovely. Mr. Trevlyn greeted her with a grave, respectful bow, and at once led her to the family carriage that waited on the wharf. Not until they were all seated therein did Leonie fully realize the situation.

"Where are you taking me?" she cried, starting up in alarm.

"To my own home."

She looked at him in a half-frightened way.

"You must not!" she gasped. "I have no claim upon you. Why should you be so kind to me?"

"Have you friends to whom you prefer to go?"

"Not one!" she answered, bursting into wild tears again. "I am alone—homeless—with nowhere to go."

Almost unconsciously he laid his hand upon her heaving shoulder.

"Be calm," he said. "It is best that you should go with my daughter and me for the present. I should not dare leave you to shift for yourself in a great city like this. Pray do not deny us the pleasure of befriending you."

She said no more, but fell back, and hid her face. No one noticed it, but ever and anon a slight shudder ran through her frame.

After a long drive the carriage drew up before a handsome house in the suburbs of the city. Mrs. Webb, the housekeeper, and two or three servants waited in the hall to receive their master and young mistress. Leonie had scarcely crossed the threshold when she started back suddenly with a sharp little cry, half uttered, and fixed her eyes in terror on the housekeeper's face.

"My God! my God!" she said, faintly.

Geralda heard the cry, and hurried to her side.

"What is it?" she said, in an anxious voice.

"Are you ill?"

"I—I—felt a momentary faintness," was the answer. "It is gone now—I am myself again."

And yet her face was livid, and she shook from head to foot. Geralda half fancied she saw the light, furtive gray eyes of the housekeeper flash swift as lightning a glance of warning and menace into those of the pale, shivering girl beside her.

"You are tired and nervous, Miss West," she said, as kindly as she could, "and would like to go and lie down at once, perhaps."

"Oh, yes, if you please."

Geralda turned to Mrs. Webb.

"Show this lady to the guest-chamber, and await her orders," she said.

The housekeeper bowed, glanced again swiftly at Leonie, and began climbing the stairs in utter silence.

The latter hesitated an instant, a wild, hunted expression coming into her eyes. "It is destiny! Why struggle against it?" she said to herself, then slowly followed Mrs. Webb.

Robert Trevlyn looked after her with a heavy sigh. "Poor, poor child. So beautiful, so friendless, and so unhappy."

At this juncture a shrill cry of pain and rage came from an inner room. Mr. Trevlyn started, and a curious expression blended of grief, self-reproach and tenderness swept over his face. Springing toward the half-open door, he pushed it wide.

"Garnet, my darling, where are you?" he exclaimed.

From the softness and sweetness of his tones one might have thought a lover was calling for his idol; and yet it was only a little girl of ten or twelve years who retreated before him, limping toward the furthest corner of the room, a poor, little, pallid, misshapen creature without a line of grace in her deformed body, or a trace of beauty in her dark, pinched features.

Robert Trevlyn had been left with two motherless children, and even his beautiful elder daughter had never won from him such demonstrative love and pitying tenderness as this poor little ugly cripple, who had only himself to pet and humor her.

"There, there. Don't run away, Garnet, my dear," he said, coaxingly. "Why should you?"

The child turned, and shook her clenched hand at him.

"I am angry with you, papa, very angry indeed," she said, in a whining voice.

"What have I done now, my pet?"

"You don't love me," she complained. "I made Mrs. Webb get up and dress me by gaslight, and have been waiting here ever since. I wanted to be the first to welcome you. The time seemed so long that I grew sick and tired of everything; and now that you have come instead of rushing to seek me, you don't even ask after me, or seem to care whether I'm dead or alive."

"I was coming to you directly."

"I don't believe it," she said, sharply, fixing her keen little red eyes (the poor thing had been named Garnet because of the color of her eyes) upon his face. "You were so taken up with the lady that you never once thought of your ugly cripple. I saw how it was. I hate the lady, and I hate you, and I wish there were no such persons as any of us in the world."

A faint color rose in his cheeks, but he did not attempt to restrain her. It would have been useless.

"Who is she, papa? Tell me—I wish to know all about her. I'm going, by and by, to tell her that I hate her."

"Don't. You must not," he pleaded. "She is a poor child we found in trouble, and I hope you will do nothing to add to her distress. Promise me, Garnet."

"I won't," she said, sullenly. "Have I not a right to tell people what I think of them? Don't try to coax me over, papa; it's of no use. I'm angry with you now, remember, and intend to have my own way."

Nevertheless the queer, half-demented little creature suffered him to slip his strong arms round her and draw her close to his heavily-beating heart.

CHAPTER II.

LEONIE FINDS FRIENDS.

He who will not give
Some portion of his care, his blood, his wealth,
For others' good, is a poor frozen churl.

—JOANNA BAILLIE.

THE chamber to which the housekeeper conducted Leonie was one of the handsomest in the house. A velvet carpet covered the floor, rich draperies of satin-damask and embroidered lace hung at the windows, and the furniture was the costliest that money could procure.

Mrs. Webb shut the door, sharply, then turned to her companion with something between a frown and a sneer on her thin, chalk-colored face.

"Well?" she uttered, interrogatively.

There was no response. Leonie sunk into a chair, and leaned her head dejectedly upon her hand. Her whole attitude expressed apathy and despair.

Her silence seemed to irritate the woman. "Don't seek to deceive me! I recognized you at a glance," she cried, with an angry hiss. "Now, what have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothing," came the low, coldly-spoken response. "If you wish to expose me to these people, pray do so. It matters little what befalls me, now."

Mrs. Webb looked at her a moment in silence. "Did you expect to find me here?" she asked at length.

"No. I had lost all trace of you."

"I intended you should. It was rather a relief to turn my back on everybody I used to know. I have been Mr. Trevlyn's housekeeper for a year. But it is not of myself I wish to speak. Why are you here, and how did you happen to fall in with my employer and his daughter?"

"Mr. Trevlyn saved my life."

"Saved your life?" echoed the woman, in a bewildered tone. "How? Where?"

Leonie told her. "We were on the same

boat. I was crazed, desperate with trouble, and sought to destroy myself. But for him I should have succeeded. He brought me here."

Mrs. Webb stared at her as if fascinated. "Mad girl! Did you really lay violent hands on yourself? What drove you to the rash act?"

Instead of replying, Leonie buried her face in her hands, and rocked backward and forward, like one beside herself.

"You had better confide in me fully," said the housekeeper, more kindly, after watching her for some moments in silence. "There is evidently some trouble of which I know nothing. Tell me all, and I may be able to help you."

"No one can do that."

"Do you decline to trust me?"

Leonie lifted her eyes, but there was an expression of such utter terror in them that they were quickly averted.

"I must—at least, for the present," she answered.

"Promise me one thing, that you will not again seek to destroy yourself, and I will ask no more."

"Don't be afraid. That temptation is gone, forever. I am wretched and ill—will you be good enough to leave me?"

It may have been an hour after the housekeeper went away that an uncertain step approached the door, and the knob was turned, unceremoniously. Leonie had scarcely stirred since Mrs. Webb left her, but a red spot burned on either cheek and her eyes gleamed strangely. She turned with a sharp exclamation of amazement as the door unclosed, and a wilted little figure hobbled across the threshold.

"Why, who are you?" she cried, involuntarily.

Garnet threw back her head. "I came here to ask questions, not to answer them," she said, in her sarillest tones. "If you are wise, you will be very civil to me. But it may be just as well to tell you at the outset that I hate you—I hate you."

There was something almost terrible in the words, though uttered by the lips of a child. Leonie drew back, growing perceptibly paler. The small red eyes glared at her like those of a demon.

"Don't say that," she cried. "I am lonely and friendless enough, already."

Garnet looked bewildered.

"You lonely? you friendless?" she echoed, incredulously. "Papa said you were in trouble, but I didn't believe him. How can it be? You are not ugly, and wilted, and deformed! You need not live shut away from the sight of other mortals as a creature too hideous to be gazed upon. What is there to make one like you unhappy?"

Leonie wrung her hands, desperately.

"Oh, child, child! you little know. There are worse things in this world than mere physical deformity."

"I'd like to know what they are."

She gave her head another toss, but came a step nearer. The conviction that this beautiful lady might really be unhappy was forcing its way home to her mind, and awakening a sudden interest in her breast.

"Is it true that you feel friendless and forlorn—as though all the bright, beautiful things of this world were made for others, and you had no share in them?" she asked, keeping those terrible eyes fixed upon Leonie's face.

"Yes—yes."

"I believe you do." She spoke slowly, and with great deliberation. "You may be as great an outcast as I am. At any rate I dislike you no longer. I may even learn to love you in time."

"I hope you will."

"Just now it seems a very easy thing to do. I can't abide any one so pink and pretty and perfectly formed as my sister Geraldine. The contrast makes me feel myself more hideous than ever. But for some reason you seem different. I hated you at first because you kept papa from coming to me directly, as he usually does. But, that feeling is gone now; we may be very good friends, after all."

And they were, from that time forward. Garnet's deformity made her, in some sense, an alien, and it was a relief to the strange child to find some one as forlorn and miserable as herself. Her heart went out to Leonie in a love that was full of pathos and forbearance.

The next morning Leonie went down-stairs for the first time since her arrival. There was no one in the lower hall, and not knowing which way to turn, she hesitatingly pushed open the nearest door. It led into Mr. Trevlyn's study, and he sat within, reading the morning paper. He turned and looked at her earnestly.

"I am glad to see that you are better, Miss West," he said.

A flush kindled in her cheeks.

"Mr. Trevlyn," she began, in an agitated voice, "I have not thanked you for risking your life to save mine, and desire to do so now. It was a brave, a noble thing to do."

"I am glad it was my privilege to rescue you," he said, even more agitated than herself. "It would be a cause of deep regret if another had been before me."

"And yet, the life that has been preserved is valueless to me."

He felt his pulses start.

"I don't know why," he said.

"I have told you how desolate it is."

"Happier days are in store for you, I am sure. At any rate you are no longer friendless. You shall have a home here as long as you are willing to remain."

The girl's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"How good, how generous you are!" she exclaimed. "But I am an alien and a stranger. I have no right to trespass upon your kindness."

"We will not give you up," he said, with quiet determination. "I have arranged everything—or, rather, Garnet has done so for me. The child has taken a great liking to you, Miss West. She declares you shall remain as her governess, and Garnet always has her own way about everything. Oh, pray do not disappoint my poor, crippled pet. It is not often that she takes a fancy to one of her own sex, and I have great difficulty in providing her with suitable teachers. She drove the last one from the house before she had been here an hour."

Leonie clasped her hands, as though seized by a sudden passion of excitement.

"Do you wish to engage me as Garnet's governess?" she cried. "Do you really wish it?"

"Yes. Is there any reason why the situation would be disagreeable to you?"

"No! no!" she answered, helplessly, almost wildly.

"Then we will consider the matter settled, if you please."

Leonie turned slowly away. She was very pale, and trembled a little. She felt instinctively that another crisis in her history had passed. Strange thoughts were stirring in her mind—thoughts upon which she dared not dwell even in secret.

The purport of these vague reflections soon found expression from another, however. Not many days had elapsed before Mrs. Webb, who was a close observer, came into the chamber where Leonie sat alone, one afternoon, and said, abruptly:

"You are getting on famously. Of course your good fortune has driven the idea of suicide out of your head forever."

The girl roused herself with a start.

"What—what—are you saying?" she asked, turning in her chair.

"As though you did not understand!" laughed the housekeeper, with provoking slyness.

"But I wish you success with all my heart."

"Success in what?"

"In winning Robert Trevlyn's hand and fortune, of course," came the coarse reply. "I'm not such a fool that I cannot see through your little game. But, don't be afraid—it is not my purpose to block it. Go on charming your victim as you have begun and you will be Mr. Trevlyn's wife before a single month has rolled around."

The crimson of emotion on the girl's cheek faded suddenly to a gray, livid pallor.

"No, no, no," she cried, in strangely shrill, piercing tones; "that can never be! You don't know what you are saying. Robert Trevlyn's wife? Oh, never—never!" And she fell back, shaking like one in an ague-fit.

"Why not, I'd like to know? He's fairly bewitched after you already. You can't afford to let such an opportunity slip through your fingers. Only think what it is to be feasted and courted every day of your life, and roll in riches and splendor! You would be an idiot to throw away a chance like that!"

But Leonie only turned her eyes away with a gasp of sudden terror.

"Hush!" she hoarsely uttered. "Don't help to put such thoughts into my head. Don't, don't! I'm vile enough already—why do you seek to make me any worse?"

CHAPTER III.

PASSION AND TEMPTATION.

Even innocence itself hath many a wile.

—BYRON.

ONE day, when nearly two weeks had elapsed, the child Garnet was sitting alone on one of the

little balconies at the rear of the house, carving rude figures on tiny blocks of wood—a favorite pastime with her—when a man's tall, stalwart figure stole across the lawn, keeping in the shadow of the shrubbery all that was possible.

He was a handsome young fellow with a dark, expressive face and brilliant black eyes. He had reached the balcony, and stood leaning over the rail before Garnet troubled herself to look up.

"Ray Armitage!" she exclaimed, starting back with an expression of anger and dislike upon her face.

"Hush!" whispered the young man, anxiously. "I wish to see Geraldine. Won't you be good enough to tell her I am here?"

"No, indeed! How dare you ask such a favor at my hands? Go away this instant or I'll tell papa that you are here."

"That would be very unkind of you, Garnet."

"I don't care," she cried, violently. "I hate you, Ray Armitage."

"But what have I done to merit your displeasure?"

"I dislike everybody that papa dislikes. That is reason enough. But if you want another I'll give it. Do you?" And she rolled her eyes up at him maliciously.

"Yes," he replied. "It may be better than the first—more reasonable, at least."

A smile of sly cunning broke around her mouth.

"You will think so, no doubt. I hate you in the second place because you deceived papa, betrayed his trust, and were even mean enough to steal money from his desk! Aren't you ashamed of yourself—a low, common thief?"

She looked like a grinning demon. The young man staggered backward as though he had received a blow, whitening, and losing his breath. His eyes were turned in terror on her face.

"I—I—don't understand," he said, helplessly.

"Don't you? That is very strange. The word thief is no uncommon one."

"Who dares apply it to me?" he exclaimed, growing hot all at once, with excitement.

"I do," said the imp. "Now don't deny that you stole the money, for I know all about it. I heard papa telling Geraldine. They did not intend to let me know of the loss, but I crept behind the door and listened."

"This is infamous," cried Ray, in horror. "Surely, surely no one believes me guilty of a petty crime like that!"

The words had scarcely left his lips before he heard the glass door opening on the balcony softly unclosed, and Geraldine came toward him, looking pale and agitated.

"Oh, Ray, it is you!" she exclaimed, eagerly extending her hands in welcome. "I heard some one talking, and felt sure I recognized your voice. But why, why are you here? Papa will be very angry if he knows of this."

"He shall know it," said Garnet, throwing down her carving materials. "It is I who will tell him."

"You! No, no, you must not."

Giving her head an angry toss, she hobbled toward the door.

"Let her go," said Ray, when Geraldine would have detained her sister. "It is now my wish to see Mr. Trevlyn. Do you know what that child has been saying? She accuses me of being a common thief! of having robbed your father! Great God! is it not horrible?"

Geraldine burst into tears.

"I hoped you would never learn of this," she panted. "Papa had promised me that nothing should be said or done. He would have kept his word."

The young man leaned forward with a sharp and sudden cry.

"Do you believe me guilty, Geraldine?"

"Oh, no, no!" she answered. "I have never believed it for one instant. I never will."

Garnet had disappeared, and just then her shrill voice was heard calling to her father. Geraldine shuddered at the sound, and gave the young man an imploring glance.

"Must you remain and meet him?" she whispered.

Ray did not speak. His excitement had calmed a little, but he looked firm and resolute. A sense of wrong and shame stung him to the quick. Robert Trevlyn had never been either just or generous to him. There had existed a smothered antipathy ever since he, Ray, had been left to the elder man's guardianship—a period of ten years. Both were proud, self-willed men, and a clash had been inevitable. Matters had culminated at last in the young man's banishment. The story was simple enough, but a tender love idyl had crept through it, render-

ing it very pathetic—at least to the two most interested.

After a brief interval heavy footsteps were heard, and Mr. Trevlyn made his appearance on the balcony. Garnet had told him who was there, and came out behind him, grinning like a vicious sprite. The man was red in the face, and cast furious glances about him.

"You have dared show your face here again!" he hissed, striding up to the obnoxious visitor. "I wonder at it. Leave the place instantly."

"I have a few words to say before I go," Ray returned. "Is it true that you have missed sums of money from your desk?"

"Such a question—coming from you—deserves no answer. It invariably happened that you had been at the house shortly before the money disappeared."

Ray involuntarily put up his hand, the words carried such venom with them.

"I have but just been told of the circumstances," he said, faintly. "It is dreadful that you should suspect me of the crime."

"It is still more dreadful that you should be guilty of it."

"I am not guilty!"

"That is a lie!" screamed Garnet, from behind her father's back. "You had better confess. The proofs are all against you."

Mr. Trevlyn turned suddenly.

"What do you know of this miserable business?" he demanded.

"Every thing," she replied. "You and Gerald need not think to keep any secrets from me. If watching and eavesdropping are of any use, I shall be sure to find them out. There was a glove found in your desk the last time money was missed—Ray Armitage's glove—"

A cry, shrill and full of anguish, interrupted her. The young man clung to the railing as though he felt sick and faint.

"Is this true?" he faltered.

A look answered him—such a look as filled him with utter horror and despair. After a moment's dead silence he let go his hold, and began to move heavily away.

"It is useless to declare my innocence," said he, "but it will some day be established. God will not suffer the guilty to triumph forever. An enemy has done this cruel deed to ruin me. The day will surely come when we shall know who it is."

"You have learned your part well," Garnet called after him in a gibing tone. "You play injured innocence to perfection."

He did not answer or look back. When he had disappeared in the shrubbery Gerald drew closer to her father, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Papa," she said, "be generous, and help to clear him from this shame! It can be done. Think, think, how it must crush life and youth and hope out of his heart!"

A stubborn look settled upon Mr. Trevlyn's face.

"My faith in the rascal is dead. The proofs are conclusive. It seems that nothing would shake your belief in his innocence, Gerald."

"I would sooner think evil of myself."

"This is madness—folly."

"It may be," she said, wearily. "I must cling to it all the same. It would be terrible to be compelled to doubt him."

About this time Gerald had other troubles than that in which Ray Armitage was concerned. As the days were on she could not help observing that her father spent vastly more time in the society of the new governess (as Leonie had come to be styled) than was either safe or becoming. Sometimes Miss West and her self-willed charge spent the whole morning with him in the study, and they were almost invariably together of an evening. Mr. Trevlyn followed her about constantly, and seemed restless and unhappy away from her presence.

"It is not possible that he is learning to love her," Gerald said to herself. "Oh, no! papa would not be so foolish."

One evening when she had been out, and returned unexpectedly, the study door happened to be ajar as she crossed the hall, and on turning a careless glance in that direction she beheld a tableau that rooted her feet to the spot.

Mr. Trevlyn and Leonie were there alone on this occasion. The latter sat trifling with a bit of fine sewing only intended to exhibit the exquisite shape of her slender, dimpled hands, while Robert Trevlyn leaned over her chair, a strong, deep passion flushing his handsome face.

One moment, and the infatuated man had caught Leonie's hand, in a half-frenzied way, and raised it to his lips.

Gerald roused herself presently, and passed on. The instant she reached her chamber she rang the bell—a sharp, imperative peal.

"Request Miss West to come here," she said to the servant who answered the summons.

Leonie came at once. A pretty, soft color was glowing in her cheeks, and it occurred to Gerald, for the first time, perhaps, what a wonderfully attractive young person she was.

"I believe you sent for me, Miss Trevlyn," she gently said.

"Yes, sit down, if you please."

She sunk timidly into the seat indicated. There was something in Gerald's looks and manner that filled her with secret uneasiness.

"Pardon me if I speak very plainly, Miss West," the latter began. "I have come to the conclusion that you are not a suitable instructor for my sister, and shall discharge you at once."

Leonie started, and turned very pale; but, in the surprise of the moment, could only stammer out a few hesitating words.

"What—if I may inquire—have you noticed in my manner of teaching to—to—displease you?"

"I prefer not to discuss the matter," Gerald coldly replied. "You shall be paid your wages the first thing in the morning, and I propose to add a few dollars instead of giving the usual month's warning. You shall have enough to keep you respectably until another situation can be secured."

Leonie sat for a moment nervously twisting her hands together as they lay in her lap.

"It was Mr. Trevlyn who engaged me," she said, at length, "and of course he must be spoken to—"

"Papa gives me full liberty in these matters," Gerald interrupted somewhat haughtily. "I can at any time discharge a servant who is—unsatisfactory."

A flush kindled in the girl's cheeks, but she rose at once.

"Of course I cannot dispute your wishes, Miss Trevlyn. I shall be ready to depart in the morning."

She went directly to her room, the same luxurious chamber that had been given to her at first. She had a natural liking for rich belongings and had become quite fond of it. As she glanced round the pretty place and thought of what was before her, she sunk sobbing beside the couch and hid her face upon her arms.

Presently a hand fell upon her heaving shoulder. She looked round with a start. The child Garnet had stolen in, and was kneeling beside her.

"What is it? What's the matter, dear Miss West?" she asked.

Leonie caught the strange little creature to her heart.

"I am going away—to leave you," she panted. "And it makes me very unhappy to think of it."

"Going away! Who says so? Why are you going?"

"Miss Trevlyn has discharged me. She thinks you would improve faster under another governess, I suppose."

Garnet started upright in a moment.

"I don't want any other!" she cried, her face dark with passion. "I'll have no one but you! What right has Gerald to meddle between us? I won't submit to it. Wicked, cruel girl, she shall not send away the only person I care for! She shall not! We'll see who is to decide such questions—we'll see!"

"Hush," said Leonie, trying to soothe her. "Please be quiet. You may find some one you will like even better than me, and—"

"If anybody dares come in your place I'll make the house too hot to hold her!" screamed the child, growing ghastly with excitement. "It's you I want, and no one else. It's you I'll have. Come—come here. We'll see!"

Seizing hold of Leonie's arm, she half led, half dragged her to the door. She seemed possessed of the strength of a wild animal, all at once.

"Be calm," urged Leonie, really frightened at the child's ghastly face.

"Come!" Garnet repeated, in shrill tones. "We will see!"

"What do you purpose doing?"

There was no answer, but the half-demented creature pulled so fiercely at Leonie's sleeve, and looked so pale and terrible that the latter could only yield submissively to her wishes. It would not have been safe to cross her, just then. They were down-stairs, and Garnet had thrown open the study door where Mr. Trevlyn still sat, and pulled Leonie across the threshold before the latter realized what were the child's intentions.

Her words came like the breaking forth of a torrent, before any one could interpose.

"Papa, who rules in this house? Is it you or

Gerald? The question must be settled here and now. Have I no rights that are bound to be respected? Am I a slave that I must bow and cringe to the will of my elder sister? I won't bear it! I'll kill myself first. And if I do you will be as guilty as the rest if this injustice is suffered to continue."

Mr. Trevlyn started to his feet in amazement.

"What is it, darling?" he inquired. "What has happened now to distress you?"

"Gerald has insulted the only person I love. She cares nothing for my wishes in the matter. She has taken it upon herself to discharge poor Miss West."

He started and turned pale at the announcement. "Is this true?" he said, after a moment's hesitation, fixing his eyes upon Leonie's changing face.

She replied in the affirmative.

"I am very much surprised. What were Gerald's reasons for dismissing you so abruptly?"

"She declined to give any."

Another pause, then a sudden flush rose in Mr. Trevlyn's face. He thought he could divine what had led his daughter to take so summary a step.

"Go away for a few moments, my child," he said, abruptly, leading Garnet to the door. "I wish to speak with Miss West alone."

"She is not to leave us, remember that," said the spoiled darling, ere she disappeared.

Mr. Trevlyn closed the door, and turned to Leonie, who stood pale and trembling near the center of the apartment.

"Gerald's course has decided me to speak my mind fully and frankly at once," he said, in an agitated voice. "You must know what I mean, Miss West. I think you have understood, for some time, how I was learning to regard you."

"No, no," she cried, catching her breath, and shaking from head to foot. "I have understood nothing. Oh, sir, spare me! I cannot—cannot listen!"

There was something in her manner that filled him with surprise—almost terror. But he had gone too far to retreat.

"You must listen," he said. "No woman in the world can stir my heart as you have done. Don't tell me that I have loved in vain—that you can never be my wife."

"Your wife! Great God, it is cruel, cruel, to tempt me so! I am selfish and weak."

She uttered a suppressed cry, and pressed her hand upon her heart, as if to still its passionate heavings. Her eyes had a wild look, and her face was livid.

"It is not much that I ask," he said, dropping his arm about her waist. "Only a little love and forbearance. Surely you can give that. God knows I shall do my best to make you nappy."

A shudder ran through her frame, but she did not draw herself away. Perhaps she had no strength to do so. But a strange horror was in her face as she hid it upon his shoulder. Unconsciously, while standing there, she had tugged so fiercely at the valuable and somewhat remarkable-looking ring on the third finger of her left hand that a purple mark was left upon the delicate flesh.

Gerald passed a sleepless night. When she descended to the breakfast-room the next morning, Mrs. Webb was the only person present, and but two plates—for herself and Garnet—had been laid.

"Where is papa?" she said. "Has he not risen?"

"He is gone," the housekeeper answered.

"Gone?"

"He left for Washington by the early train. You will find a note from him lying beside your plate."

Gerald felt surprised, but no suspicion of the disagreeable truth broke upon her mind. She picked up the note, vaguely wondering what could have called her father away so suddenly. It was very brief, and ran thus:

"DEAR GERALD:

"By the time you read these lines I and Miss West will be man and wife. She was resolved to leave here, and I could not permit her to go alone. You have only yourself to blame that we went away secretly without any previous warning."

"ROBERT TREVLYN."

The closing words swam before Gerald's eyes. She sunk down on a chair, feeling sick and faint. The suddenness of the revelation had well nigh overpowered her. It seemed terrible.

Did, even then, some faint premonition cross her mind of the crime, horror, sin and suffering

destined to result from that hasty and ill-starred marriage? It may be.

While she sat motionless, an unsteady step crossed the floor, and Garnet's pinched little face was suddenly thrust close to hers.

"I'd like to see you drive Leonie from the house, now," grinned the exasperating little inn. "It's you who will have to go, if anybody does."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DIAMOND RING.

Search not to find what lies too deeply hid;
Nor to know things whose knowledge is forbid.
—DENHAM.

THREE weeks elapsed before the bride and groom returned from their honeymoon trip.

The day on which they were expected dawned wet and wild. Rain fell in torrents all the morning, but late in the afternoon the clouds broke, and a glimpse of blue sky appeared with a sudden burst of sunshine.

Geralda had dressed herself earlier than usual, and at length she stole forth to take a turn in the sodden walks of the garden. She had only been there a very few moments, however, when some one came through the gate, and a deep, musical voice spoke her name.

"Geralda, is that you?"

The man who came quickly to her side was young and handsome. He had an olive complexion, clearly-cut features, black hair and magnetic black eyes. There was something peculiarly fascinating about the man, and yet good judges of human nature were a little cautious in trusting Dudley Linton, the handsome artist, despite his pleasing ways and winning smile.

The red came and went under Geralda's fair skin, and her heart beat faster than its wont.

"How you startled me!" she exclaimed, impulsively, giving him both her hands. "I was not looking for you to-day."

He smiled, and drew her closely to his side.

"I returned to New York this afternoon, and came here at once, of course. Are you glad to see me?"

"You were a long time away," she answered, a soft, rich color glowing in her cheeks.

"Five weeks. Business detained me. I expected, when I left, to complete it in as many days."

She turned and looked at him curiously.

"I thought you were making studies for pictures, Dudley."

"So I was—part of the time, at least," he answered, coloring, and looking the least bit annoyed. "My leisure moments were all employed in that manner."

"You must have brought back a well-filled portfolio."

"I did."

They presently returned to the house. Geralda's face was glowing, and her eyes shone with subdued happiness as she stood beside her guest in the luxurious drawing-room. When Ray Armitage's image did not rise between them (which it had an exasperating habit of doing) she felt convinced that she loved Dudley better than anybody in the world.

"I am glad you arrived before papa," she said. "You must remain to welcome him. We expect him every moment."

He looked up quickly.

"Is it true that Mr. Trevlyn has married again?"

"Quite true. He brings his bride home to-day."

"I heard nothing of it until my return. It must have been very sudden."

"Yes."

"Why did you never speak of it in your letters?"

"I could not," she answered, with a swift gesture of repugnance. "The subject was extremely distasteful to me, and I did not compel myself to broach it."

"You are not pleased with the marriage?" he said, quickly.

"It is over, and can't be undone," she answered, with a sigh. "I have schooled myself to feel reconciled, and trust that papa will be happy with the wife he has chosen."

"Who was she, and where did he find her?"

Before Geralda could reply, a maid-servant appeared at the door. She looked in, but observing that her mistress was not alone, would have retreated had not the latter, struck by something peculiar in her looks, called to her.

"Something has happened, Mary," she said.

"What is it?"

"Cook has found a ring, that's all, miss," replied the girl. "She said I was to bring it to you. Here it is."

"Why, this is Miss West's ring!" Geralda exclaimed, as she took it.

"Yes, miss; that's what cook and I thought."

"Where was it found?"

"In the well at the rear of the house. Cook dipped it up in a bucket of water."

Geralda looked surprised and a little bewildered.

"It is singular how it got there," she said, thoughtfully. "I distinctly remember seeing the ring on—" she hesitated a moment, then added with an effort, "on Mrs. Trevlyn's finger the evening before she went away."

When the servant had withdrawn, Dudley Linton drew nearer, and looked at the ring. It was a singular ornament, evidently of foreign workmanship, and bore at its widest point a cross made up of very small diamonds.

The young man felt his pulses start as he gazed, and in spite of every effort his face blanched to an ashen pallor.

"Are—are you sure this is the jewel the present Mrs. Trevlyn was accustomed to wear?" he asked.

"There can be no doubt of it," Geralda replied, struck by his agitation, and a peculiar huskiness in his voice, as though his throat were dry. "The design is peculiar, as you can see for yourself, and not one to be easily mistaken."

"True."

"I noticed it particularly because it seemed a valuable ornament for one in Miss West's position to wear."

"What was her position?"

"She lived in the house as Garnet's governess until papa made her his wife."

Dudley Linton drew a quick breath, and pressed his hands upon his eyes. Some strong emotion that he wished to repress was evidently stirring within.

"How strange it seems that the ring should have been found in the well," he said, in a musing tone.

"Yes. I am tempted to believe it was thrown in deliberately."

They had been conversing so earnestly that neither had noticed the roll of wheels on the drive, or that a carriage had drawn up before the door; but at this moment the bell rung, and voices were heard in the hall.

"It is papa," Geralda exclaimed, slipping the ring into the pocket of her dress.

Just then Mrs. Webb ushered in Robert Trevlyn and his bride.

Leonie looked very beautiful as she advanced, leaning upon the arm of the noble man she had married. A warm color glowed in her rounded cheeks, and her dark-blue eyes were full of gentle happiness. The slight trace of embarrassment perceptible in her manner seemed only an added charm. Even Geralda thought her more beautiful than ever. Dudley Linton stood a little to one side, and at first she did not see him.

"Dear Geralda," she said, in soft, pleading tones, "will you not be generous and forgiving, and give me the welcome I so much desire? For your father's sake we must be friends."

It was then that her glance fell suddenly upon the young man. For the space of ten seconds they stood looking straight into each other's eyes. Dudley's face wore a cringing expression, in which shame and fear were singularly blended. That he would have shunned that encounter, had it been left for him to choose, there is no doubt.

Over Leonie's features swept a sudden and terrible change. All the rich color that had made her face so beautiful a moment before, died out utterly, leaving a strange, sickly white. She stared at the man with incredulous eyes and parted lips, and uttering a miserable cry, stifled almost at its beginning, fell back insensible.

She was caught in her husband's arms.

"Good God!" he wildly exclaimed. "What has caused this?"

At nearly the same instant the child Garnet rushed into the room, uttering shrill cries of grief and terror. She had been attracted from her chamber in another part of the house by the confusion caused by the arrival, and partly to spite Geralda, partly out of real regard for the woman her father had married, she was prepared to welcome her with effusion. It shocked and frightened her to find only a cold, senseless figure to receive her caresses.

"What is it?" she gasped. "What dreadful thing has happened? Is my poor friend dead? How cold she is! how still! how deathly-white! Oh, who has done this?"

Leonie was laid on the sofa, and Mrs. Webb hurried for restoratives, and began chafing her cold hands and temples while Mr. Trevlyn hung over his young wife the picture of abject mis-

ery. How different was this from the coming home he had mentally depicted!

Dudley Linton stood near, looking very pale. Ever and anon he would glance around the room as if in bewildered search of some means of escape. He looked like a man at bay, and with difficulty kept any control over himself.

Suddenly he met Geralda's eye. She was gazing at him curiously and a little suspiciously. Evidently there was something in the scene that had surprised and puzzled her.

"Some explanation is necessary," she said, in a low, cold voice. "Can you give it?"

"I—I—don't know what you mean," he faltered.

"You do know," she persisted, quietly but decisively. "I hope you will deal frankly with me. This person," with a sidelong inclination of her head toward the sofa, "is evidently well known to you. It was meeting you unexpectedly that caused her to faint."

"You are mistaken, Geralda," he replied, with well-assumed earnestness. "Mrs. Trevlyn is an utter stranger to me."

Geralda turned proudly away. She felt that he was deceiving her. There was dead silence between them for a few moments. Presently, when Leonie showed signs of returning consciousness, he drew nervously back from the sofa, and said, in a constrained voice:

"I had better go. I can be of no service, here. The poor lady should see only the familiar faces of her friends when she recovers."

No one sought to detain him, and he departed. The door had scarcely closed, however, when Leonie opened her eyes and suddenly raised her head from the pillow.

"Hide me!" she gasped. "I saw him—here, in this room! For God's sake, keep him away!"

"Hush, darling. Calm yourself," Mr. Trevlyn gently said. "No one shall harm you."

Mrs. Webb left off chafing the cold little hands, and started to her feet.

"The poor lady raves," she said. "Perhaps a physician had better be called in, and a soothing potion prepared."

The words seemed to recall Leonie's wandering wits. Strange shudderings were creeping over her, but she suppressed them by a strong effort, and smiled faintly into her husband's anxious face.

"No," she said, "I am better, now. It was very foolish of me to faint. Suspense and anxiety were the cause, I suppose. It was a trying ordeal—to come back to this house under existing circumstances. You must forgive me for being so overcome."

"My sensitive darling!" murmured the infatuated man. "The weakness is one for which you are not in the least to blame."

"You need not have cherished a single anxious thought," cried Garnet, her red eyes burning luridly. "There is no one here who would dare ill-treat you, now. I'd like to see them try it!" And she flashed an angry glance into her sister's face.

But Geralda's heart was not to be moved. She felt that Leonie intended to deceive them all, and the conviction only deepened the dislike she had entertained from the first. She left the room without a word.

Garnet soon followed, but she would not go until she saw Mrs. Trevlyn sitting up in one of the easy-chairs, and a slight tinge of color had returned to her face.

Mrs. Webb was the last to go away. Before she went out Leonie called her to her side, and said something in a hurried whisper.

"Come back when my husband leaves me. I wish to see you, alone."

Some time elapsed before this event occurred, however. Robert Trevlyn was the most devoted of husbands, and found it very pleasant to linger beside his wife, playing the rôle of nurse and consoler. Her pallor only made her look prettier and more helpless than ever. It seemed like a direct appeal to all the noble, protecting impulses of his nature. She was even compelled to complain of weariness, and express a desire to be left alone.

The housekeeper was on the watch, and entered, immediately. Going straight up to her mistress's chair, she said, in sharp, though suppressed accents:

"Now, what is it? Speak quickly!"

Leonie glanced shudderingly around the room. "I have a few questions to ask. Please answer them as briefly as possible. 'There was some one here, a visitor, when I arrived?'"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"Mr. Dudley Linton," the woman answered, glancing curiously at that white, working face.

"He went away, again? I thought so. Well, did he say anything before he left?"

"What about?"

"About me."

"Not a word."

An expression of relief flitted over Leonie's colorless face. After a moment's silence, she resumed, with an effort:

"This gentleman—Linton, I think you called his name—is a friend of the family, of course?"

"He's Miss Geralda's lover."

"Her lover! Geralda's lover! Great God!"

The words came slowly and huskily, as though wrenched from her livid lips. She fell back, her hands clutched tightly together, a kind of horror growing in her eyes.

"It is fate?" she said, at last, with a low, bitter laugh. "God help me!"

CHAPTER V.

A STOLEN INTERVIEW.

Let that pass too. There breathes not one Who would not do as I have done.—BYRON.

THE next morning an errand took Mrs. Webb some distance from the house, and as she was returning along a green lane that ran parallel with the grounds, a man came out of the hedge, and hurriedly drew near.

It was Dudley Linton. His handsome face wore an anxious expression, as though some trouble or fear weighed heavily upon his mind. The woman noticed this fact the moment she saw him.

"Are you going on to the house?" she said.

"No," he answered, then hesitated a moment. At length he abruptly added:

"Mrs. Webb, you are no common woman. I have observed you with interest ever since I began to visit here. I think you can keep a secret. Circumstances compel me to confide in some one, and I have chosen you."

She looked at him, but not a muscle of her cold face changed.

"What do you want?"

"I must see Mrs. Trevlyn. I want you to take a message to her."

"Why don't you come to the house and ask for her?"

"It must be a secret interview. Nothing else will answer my purpose. Here is money to pay for your trouble, and for saying nothing of all this to any other person."

He extended his hand, in which two gold pieces sparkled enticingly, but she struck it aside with an angry blow.

"Tell me why you wish to see my mistress," she said.

"That is my business—not yours."

She made an impatient gesture.

"I must know one thing before I consent to serve you. Is it for Mrs. Trevlyn's advantage that this meeting should take place?"

"Yes," he answered, with an agitation he could not master. "More is involved in it than you imagine. Mrs. Trevlyn may shrink from the ordeal, but I know she secretly feels as anxious for the meeting as I am. It must take place. If you decline to serve me, I shall find some other means of communicating with her."

"I have not declined. It does seem a little strange, though, that you and my mistress should turn out to be old friends, and no one ever divined the fact until now."

His lip curled in angry scorn.

"Pray spare me your comments, my good woman. I have not said that we were friends, or otherwise. That is a question that cannot particularly interest you. Will you take a note if I write one?"

"I might as well. There can be no great harm in it. My mistress need give it no attention unless she chooses."

"She will choose."

There was a gleam of power in his face, but he drew out his note-book without another word, wrote a few words in pencil on one of the leaves, then tore it out and carefully folded it.

"This will be sufficient," he said, dropping the bit of paper into her extended hand. "I hope you understand that I am confiding a great trust to you. It would make very bad business for us all if you were to betray me."

She shrugged her shoulders scornfully.

"Don't be afraid. I can't say what might be the result if you alone were concerned. But I would not make her trouble for the world."

With that she turned away. The young man stood and watched her until she passed through a wicket and disappeared.

"Has Leonie bewitched her, as she does everybody else?" he muttered. "Good God! It is strange how that girl brings everybody to her feet!"

Mrs. Webb found her mistress sitting alone in the dressing-room up-stairs. Her face wore a thoughtful expression, and there were shadows around her drooping lids. She seemed nervous and ill at ease.

"This is for you," she said, laying the note on her knee. "He gave it to me."

Leonie roused herself with a start. The little color that lingered in her face died out utterly, and her breath came and went more quickly than before.

"Do—do—you mean Mr. Linton?" she panted.

"Yes. I met him in the lane, just now, and he insisted on sending you a message. You had better find out what it is."

Leonie unfolded the note with trembling fingers. "It is an appointment," she said, faintly, after a moment's pause. "I was looking for this. What shall I do—what shall I do?"

The words came from her lips in a low, struggling cry. Leaning forward all at once she buried her face in her lap and broke into passionate sobbing.

Mrs. Webb stood beside her chair, anxious and bewildered. The outbreak had frightened her a little. It's very fierceness proved that something dark and terrible was behind all this misery. But what could it be?

A bit of crumpled paper, lying on the edge of Leonie's skirts, presently attracted her attention. It was the note Linton had written. She stooped suddenly and pounced upon it with the gesture of a hawk after its prey. She would know at least what was written therein. A glance was sufficient. Pushing the bit of paper into her pocket she turned abruptly.

"There is a secret between you and that man," she said. "What is it?"

A convulsive shudder ran through Leonie's frame.

"Don't ask me," she answered, in a husky whisper. "I cannot tell you."

"Why not? I might be able to help you if you are in trouble."

"There is no help for such trouble as mine," Leonie said, slowly lifting her white, desperate face. "I hope it will kill me. That is the only way out of the terrible complication in which I am involved. I could hail death as a blessed relief from all my misery. Go now, let me meet this sorrow alone."

The day dragged slowly along. Garnet, who enjoyed being in her step-mother's society, kept coming continually to the dressing-room. But all others kept aloof. Mr. Trevlyn was kept busy writing letters and looking over accounts; and of course Geralda was not likely to intrude. Leonie felt profoundly thankful to have only the sharp, terrible eyes of the child to meet. Even they were more than she could endure without flinching.

Nine o'clock was the hour Linton had appointed for the meeting, and the place selected was the same lonely lane in which he had encountered Mrs. Webb. Leonie rose at the first stroke of the clock, and throwing a shawl over her head and shoulders, stole down-stairs.

She was not to leave the house undetected, however. The study door opened just as she reached the lower hall, and her husband came out.

"Why, how is this?" he exclaimed, in accents of deep surprise. "You are not going out alone at this hour?"

She had stopped short, and stood with her hands clasped and her eyes fixed upon the floor. They were gleaming strangely, and she dared not raise them to his face. For a moment she did not answer; then said, with a quick-drawn breath:

"I am not going far—only to the gate and back. I shall return immediately."

"Let me go with you."

"No, no!" He had dropped his hand on her shoulder, but she shook it off almost fiercely. "I am not a child that every step I take must be watched and guarded. Be good enough to let me go on quietly by myself."

Mr. Trevlyn looked more bewildered than ever. She seemed quite unlike herself. There were traces of repressed excitement in her manner, and she had broken away from him with something like repulsion.

"What is the matter, Leonie?" he asked. "What has happened to disturb you?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?" He looked at her reproachfully.

"I am surprised that you should think it necessary to evade a direct answer."

"I am tired and nervous—that's all," she said, trying to calm herself. "The fresh air will restore me."

"If you must go out, you will do better with my arm to lean upon."

"No, I could not endure to have anybody with me. I am in no mood to converse, and it would craze me to have you following on beside me. Don't distress me by persisting—please, Robert. There is nothing to harm me."

"Of course I shall not urge my company upon you if it is not wanted, darling. Go, then," he said, in a low voice, and turned away.

He waited somewhat impatiently for his wife to return. Fifteen, twenty minutes wore away, and there was no sound of her approaching footsteps. At length he grew so concerned that he resolved to risk her displeasure by going out to seek her.

"She may have fallen ill in the grounds," he thought. "She has not seemed quite like herself since we returned home. There was a wildness in her manner when she went out that I never noticed before. She may be suffering and helpless while I am waiting here."

A moon nearly at its full rode in the sky, bathing the garden in its pearly flood. Mr. Trevlyn turned into a path leading to the gate, but he had not proceeded far before he noticed the flutter of a woman's dress a short distance in advance.

"Who's there?" he called, for it was not Leonie.

No answer. The woman looked back, then hurried on more rapidly than ever. He was compelled to call again.

This time she waited for him to come up. It proved to be Mrs. Webb. Her face was flushed, and a half-frightened expression lingered in her colorless eyes.

"Where's your mistress?" Mr. Trevlyn abruptly inquired. "Have you seen her pass this way?"

There was a moment's visible hesitation ere she replied.

"Yes. Mrs. Trevlyn turned into the path just above here, that leads to the right."

"How long ago?"

"Five or six minutes, I should say."

He said no more, but began to walk rapidly in the direction indicated. Mrs. Webb waited until he disappeared, then hurried in the opposite direction—that is, toward the lane, where she knew very well that Leonie must be, just then.

"I will warn her," she muttered. "He might suspect, at any moment, that I had deceived him and turn back. Is it possible that he scents mischief already?"

As soon as she reached the lane, the moonlight revealed two figures not far from the wicket. Dudley Linton stood haughtily upright, one hand thrust carelessly into his breast, the other clasped by the miserable woman who had flung herself at his feet. Mrs. Webb felt a sudden thrill of fear as she gazed, Leonie's attitude seemed so abject.

"Dudley, pity me!" she heard the wretched creature say. "Think what you have made me suffer already. Spare me the rest, or kill me on the spot. I am willing to die, but I cannot live on in such misery."

"The worst of your trouble is of your own creating," he said.

"Nay, not the worst—not the worst!"

"Was it my fault that you married Robert Trevlyn, and so—"

"Hush," she passionately interrupted. "You shall not reproach me. You have no right to do it. If there is any wrong or sin in that marriage you are answerable for it—you and not I!"

Though bewildered by what she had heard, Mrs. Webb dared delay no longer. Passing through the little gate, she allowed it to shut sharply behind her. The two started guiltily at the sound, and Leonie stood up pale and panting.

"Your husband is searching the grounds for you, Mrs. Trevlyn," the woman said, coming close up to them before speaking. "You had better come in at once unless you wish him to find you here."

Leonie turned suddenly, wild with excitement, and pushed Linton away.

"Go!" she gasped, in a hoarse whisper. "Go, at once. All is lost if my husband sees you."

"Yes, I will go," he said, after a minute's pause. "But I shall see you again very soon. The end is not yet."

The next instant he had plunged through the hedge. Leonie and Mrs. Webb waited a moment longer, then slowly returned to the house.

CHAPTER VI.

LEONIE'S SECRET TOLD.

"For it is with feelings as with waters, The shallow murmur, but the deep are dumb."

DUDLEY LINTON was as good as his word. The very next morning he presented himself at the Trevlyn mansion, and it happened that Leonie was alone in the drawing-room when he entered.

"You!" she panted, starting up and beginning to tremble at sight of him. "You dare come here to my husband's house, and enter my very presence!"

"Why not?" he carelessly returned. "I was accustomed to visit here before you came. It would occasion inquiry were I to remain away altogether. Boldness and strategy are one's best dependence in these matters, after all."

She looked at him quite steadily, now.

"I understand," she said, in a bitter tone. "You are Gerald's lover, and she would think strange of it were your visits suddenly to cease."

"You have heard that story, it seems," he said, flushing. "No matter. I will not deny but that Gerald's pretty face and ample fortune have attractions it is difficult to resist."

"This visit is to her, I suppose?"

"Ostensibly. It could not be otherwise, of course. But I hoped to meet you, also, and perchance gain a word with you in private. Fortune has favored me, it seems."

He drew a little nearer, and had the satisfaction of seeing her countenance change. She grew red, then pale, and seemed strangely softened and altered.

"Leonie," he abruptly continued, "I love you better than I was aware! I can read my own heart, now that it is too late, and you are bound by the most sacred of ties to another. Good God, what a villain I am! Why did I ever leave you?"

She turned from him with a wild and bitter cry.

"Too late!" she panted. "Don't say another word. I can't listen—I will not. I am an honorable man's wife—remember that."

"I would to God you were mine."

"It can never be—at least in this world."

He looked like a man beside himself.

"What a fool I have been," he groaned. "A blind, self-willed fool! I would make any sacrifice, now, for the treasure so lightly flung away. I could tear out my heart for very desperation."

The misery in his voice and looks had its effect upon the girl. She trembled more than ever, and raised her hands in an appealing gesture, like one uncertain of her own strength.

"Go away," she said. "Oh, why did you come here? Was I not wretched enough, already? In time I might have learned to be content with my situation. And now you have ruined everything—destroyed even that hope in my heart!"

"I don't care. You belong to me. I don't wish you to be happy with another."

"Hush!"

"Let me speak. It is best that we should understand each other, fully. I feel that it is impossible to break from you, and despise myself for such weakness. God alone knows what I may be tempted to do, if this goes on!"

She turned her face away, but he saw her throat swell, and suddenly she broke into passionate, tumultuous weeping.

"I am very unhappy," she said. "Have you no consideration for my feelings that you go on like this? What good can it do me now to know that you regret the past, and that you love me still? The time has gone by in which we could even speak of such things."

"True. Forgive me, Leonie. I have lost you—lost you, forever, and must submit."

His voice lowered itself to a whisper, and bending over her suddenly, his lips lightly touched her forehead.

At this instant a light, firm step crossed the hall, and Gerald Trevlyn stood in the doorway. Dudley looked startled, and fell back a few paces. How much had she seen of that tender by-play? The light from the window, opposite, fell full upon Gerald's face, revealing all its lines. She was a little pale, and seemed to gaze at him suspiciously.

In a moment he had calmed himself. "You are come just in time to present me, in due form, to Mrs. Trevlyn," he said.

"Is it necessary?" Gerald asked, in a low, cold voice.

"Perhaps not." He laughed, lightly, pretending not to notice the significance of her tone. "I found Mrs. Trevlyn here alone, and we have been trying, as well as we could, to make each other's acquaintance."

"I hope you have succeeded."

"Passably well."

Gerald threw her head back, and passed with a firm step down the room, to a deep recess quite at the other end. She had witnessed enough to make her very miserable. What did

it all mean? She had suspected before that some secret understanding existed between the two, and now she was sure of it. But why did her lover seek to blind her, and hide the truth by such shallow subterfuges? She grew hot and indignant at the very thought.

Dudley followed her, almost immediately. "You are angry with me," he said, in a conciliatory tone. "What have I done?"

"It is of no consequence," she coldly replied. "Please tell me, that I may make my peace with you."

She dropped her head. "I have nothing to say."

There was a moment's dead silence. Gerald waited, almost breathlessly, for her lover to speak. The way was open for an explanation if he felt disposed to make one. Would he?

The question was soon answered. "Well," he said, affecting a careless laugh, "it isn't worth while to quarrel about nothing. If there is anything unpleasant, we will try to forget it. Now, will you sing for me, Gerald?"

The request was only made to cover the awkwardness of the situation, and she so understood it. Nevertheless, she took her position at the piano, and suffered him to select such ballads as he preferred. She could not help being aware, however, that nearly his whole attention was given to the pale, drooping figure at the other end of the room.

Presently he forgot to turn the music on the rack. Gerald stopped short, and rose from the piano.

"I will sing no more," she said, a little excitedly. "I am tired, and you must excuse me."

Shortly afterward Dudley took his leave. As soon as he was gone, Gerald went up stairs and took from the pocket of the dress—where it had been lying half forgotten—the ring that had been found the day her father brought his young wife home. Dudley had evidently recognized the ring—it was commemorative of some tender passage between him and Leonie, perhaps—and she felt curious to learn something further concerning it.

Returning, she laid the ornament in Leonie's lap and said abruptly:

"This ring is yours, is it not, Mrs. Trevlyn?"

Over Leonie's face came a terrible change as she saw it. She started backward, losing her breath, and sat staring at it with wild, incredulous eyes and parted lips.

"My God!" she said, in a husky whisper. "Am I never to be free from that cursed trinket and what it symbolizes?"

Then, making a great effort, she succeeded in calming herself; but her voice had a weak, uncertain sound.

"Yes, the ring is mine," she said. "I—I—thought it lost beyond recovery. Where did you find it?"

"One of the servants drew it up out of the well," Gerald replied, looking curiously at her white, desperate face.

"Out of the well? It is strange how it got there."

"So I think—very strange indeed," came the response.

Leonie hesitated a moment, then with a quick, rather fierce movement, restored the ring to its old place upon her finger.

"I shall wear it night and day hereafter," she said, with a faint laugh, "and there will be no danger of losing it again."

Rising, she moved slowly from the room, and ascended the stairs; but there was an expression on her face that Gerald would rather not have seen.

An hour or two later Mrs. Webb was passing along the corridor before the door of Leonie's dressing-room, when she heard strange sounds proceeding from within. She stopped, listened a moment, then turned the knob and entered.

A strange sight met her gaze. Leonie lay prone on the floor, writhing and twisting her hands in agony. From her lips came a sound of passionate sobbing, though her eyes were dry and strange lurid lights burned in their unfathomed depths.

Mrs. Webb leaned over her, and with some show of kindness laid her hand on the girl's burning brow.

"What is it?" she said. "What's the matter?"

Leonie slowly raised herself, and the sobbing sound ceased. But she made no reply.

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the housekeeper, startled at the sight of her miserable pallor. "I had no idea you were suffering like this. What does it mean? You will kill yourself if you keep on."

Leonie held her hand tightly over her heart.

"If I could—if I only could!" she said, wear-

ily. "It would be better for me, and for all who have ever known me."

"Hush! Don't speak like that. I can't bear to hear you."

"It would be better," said the girl, passionately. "I have endured sorrows that would have killed a weaker person, but God has denied me death, though I covet it. It seems cruel—cruel! And the end is not yet. I feel that a darker doom than has ever yet been my portion is hanging over me. I see it—I know it—the air is full of it. And yet I am helpless, weak, a puppet in the hands of fate. Oh, merciful God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

"Calm yourself, Leonie," said the woman, addressing her mistress by the familiar name she often used when they were alone. "These are but the ravings of delirium."

"No, I am a lost woman. All the world will know me for one, ere long. Oh, why did I ever enter this house to bring disgrace and grief upon its innocent inmates?"

Mrs. Webb's pale face grew a shade paler. She thought she began to discern "method in this madness."

"Take care," she said, under her breath. "This is no time to play the pining fool. If a crisis is coming, you must nerve yourself to meet it. What is it that you fear?"

"Everything," came the low, unsteady response.

"You must deal quite frankly with me now, Leonie," Mrs. Webb said, after a moment's silence, looking hard at her. "It may be your only hope. There's something between you and Dudley Linton that is at the bottom of all this trouble. What is it?"

"Oh, how can I ever tell you?"

"You must," said the woman, sternly. "I've tried to make things easy for you, in one way and another, ever since you came. But I'll do nothing more in the dark. I must know the worst, or I wash my hands of you."

Leonie sat up, and for some time rocked her body backward and forward like one beside herself.

"You shall," she said at length. "I'll tell you all. But we need not begin very far back. You know as well as I do how my youth was spent in poverty and vain repinings for a higher and better lot. I felt capabilities for a grander life than could ever be mine in that lonely country village where I was born and grew to womanhood. I wished to make something splendid of myself, but destiny has always been against me."

"Yes," said Mrs. Webb, with a sneer, "I've heard of your high and romantic notions. They finally led you into trouble, did they?"

"Last summer Dudley Linton came to our village to sketch, and make studies for pictures," Leonie went on, as though the woman had not spoken. "Fate threw us together. He was the first person I had ever seen from the great world that seemed so charming to my unsophisticated eyes. You can foresee what happened. We loved each other madly—at least—"

Seeing her hesitate, Mrs. Webb leaned forward and said one word:

"Well?"

"At least I loved him with all the passion and fervor of my nature."

"Go on. What was the end?"

"I married him."

"You—married him!" gasped the woman, starting back, and staring incredulously at the speaker. "Oh, no, no!"

"I did—at least I thought it a *bona fide* marriage at the time. He took me to a cottage on the sea-shore where I lived for a season in a fool's paradise. We never went out, or received visitors, and I soon began to tire of so monotonous an existence; but when I begged to be introduced to the gay world for which I had been pining all my life, he invariably put me off on one plea and another."

"Before long Dudley began to spend most of his time away from me, and often would only pass a single day in a month at the cottage. His manner would be cold and chilling when he came. Finally we had a violent quarrel, and then—then—the bitter truth came out. He told me to my face that he had deceived me by a false marriage, and I had not the slightest claim upon him."

She hesitated a moment, and shudderingly hid her face in her hands.

"There is little more to tell," she added, in a husky voice. "That night I fled from the cottage, and came to New York. I was reckless, desperate, and sought to put an end to my wretched existence. Mr. Trevlyn rescued me from a watery grave. He loved me truly and unselfishly, and when he asked me to marry him I had not the courage to refuse. As his

wife all my ambitious dreams would be realized. Wealth, culture and position were all at my command. I might even hold my head higher than the man who had treacherously deceived me. It was a terrible temptation—you could not expect a woman in my position to resist it. I did not. I flung away the ring Dudley had placed on my finger many months before, and consented to wed my preserver and benefactor."

Mrs. Webb started up, a faint realization of the position in which Leonie had placed herself coming home to her mind.

"You did not expect to meet *him* here—that villain?" she panted.

"No, no, no! I told you fate was against me. If there is anything more to be suffered, it will surely fall to my portion."

After a brief silence the housekeeper said, thoughtfully:

"Mr. Linton will not dare expose you—he can't do that without ruining himself. You have that advantage. The secret can and must be kept."

"Yes, yes." She looked up timidly, and clung to the woman's hand. "I am not afraid," she said, flushing suddenly to the temples, she knew not why. "Dudley bitterly regrets the past, and—and—"

"What? Speak out!"

"He loves me better than ever."

Mrs. Webb turned.

"And you?" she uttered, breathlessly.

"I have tried to hate him, but it is impossible. I have forgiven everything. Ah, a woman can do anything when she loves as I love him!"

A sharp, bitter cry broke from the housekeeper's lips.

"God help you," she said. "You were never in such mortal peril as at this moment."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DAWN OF DISTRUST.

Be to her virtues very kind;
Be to her faults a little blind.

—PRIOR.

ONE evening, a week later, Mr. Trevlyn was sitting alone in his study when the door was pushed unceremoniously open and the deformed, wilted little figure of his youngest daughter limped into the room.

The gas was not burning, and only a faint, uncertain light, the reflection of the moonbeams, pervaded the apartment. Mr. Trevlyn sat in one of the duskiest corners, and at first the child did not perceive him. Halting near the door, she shaded her eyes with one hand and peered anxiously around.

"Papa, where are you?" she demanded, rather petulantly.

"Here, my darling."

He extended his arms, and Garnet hurried toward him with a glad little cry, and threw herself wearily upon his breast.

"My head aches, and I'm lonely, and want some one to cheer me up, papa," she said. "After all no one can do me good quite like you, at such times. But why are you sitting in the dark?"

"I was day-dreaming, my dear," he answered, a hint of pain in his deep, musical tones. "But I will ring for lights if you wish."

"I don't. I know it is you holding me to your heart—I could tell your touch anywhere—and that is sufficient."

"What makes my child down-hearted to-night?"

"It must be the pain, papa. I have suffered all day. Sometimes I had to bite my lips to bear it. I felt like screaming right out. I have not been so bad for a long time."

"Poor, poor lamb," he said, tightening the pressure of his arms.

"Leonie kept me with her most of the day," she went on, calling her step-mother by the familiar name that she liked best. "She sung to me, and told stories until I nearly forgot my misery. But when it grew dark she sent me away. She never allows me to sit with her in the evening. Why is it, papa?"

"I don't know, dear."

"I do," said the child, sharply. "She always goes out after dark. I've seen her steal away again and again. Isn't it a queer notion, papa, to sit in the house all day, then go prowling about the grounds as soon as night comes?"

"Does Leonie do that?" he asked, quickly.

"Of course. She's been out every evening this week. She likes the soft air and mellow moonlight, I suppose."

The man's face grew suddenly white. Leonie had led him to believe that these same evenings were spent in reading and study in the

solitude of her chamber. Why had she deceived him?

"You must be mistaken, Garnet. It was your sister Gerald, doubtless, whom you saw leave the house."

"No, it wasn't, papa. Do you think I would mistake any one else for my dear Leonie? Once I was in the upper corridor, and she passed so near that I might have touched her."

"Did you speak to her?"

"No. I didn't wish her to see me there. But it was Leonie."

"Has she gone out again this evening?"

"Yes, papa. I saw her cross the lawn just before I came to seek you. She always goes in the same direction—toward the lower end of the grounds."

Mr. Trevlyn's heart was beating quickly. He made a movement as though he would have risen from the chair, and gone to seek his wife, then fell back again with a smothered sigh.

"No," he thought, "it would be unjust to doubt her on such evidence. There must be some mistake. She would not willfully deceive me."

He might easily have gone up-stairs and ascertained whether Leonie was in her chamber or not. But something restrained him from even this little test. Was it a lurking doubt that he dreaded to have verified? He could not have told what it was, but he felt very uncomfortable. His wife's demeanor toward him for some days had been marked by something peculiar. It was not anger or indifference, but she had seemed to shrink from him as though his presence vexed and half-maddened her.

It was doubly painful to think of this now, after the careless prattle of the child. It had gained in significance all at once. Making an earnest effort, he led Garnet on to talk of something else.

The next day something occurred to increase his wretchedness. He sat on one of the verandas reading the morning paper, and Gerald was working on some fine embroidery near by. Suddenly the sound of suppressed voices came to the ears of both. Two of the servants were talking, as servants will, in the room at their backs, and the windows were open.

"Do you know that our mistress has a lover?" said one.

"Miss Gerald? Of course. That is no secret."

"I mean Mrs. Trevlyn."

"Nonsense!" sharply returned the other. "How can you say such things? It is too absurd."

"I know what I am talking about," exclaimed the first speaker. "I always said Mr. Trevlyn run a great risk in marrying a woman of whom nothing is known. It looks now as though I was not so far out of the way in my opinion."

"What have you discovered?"

"Enough to ruin the woman, if it were generally known. She steals out nearly every night to meet a man secretly in the grounds!"

"Good gracious! Are you sure?"

"Perfectly so. I have watched her. It is a tall man wearing a slouched-hat and a heavy cloak, evidently worn as a disguise."

"Dear me! To think there should be such disgraceful goings on right here under our very eyes!"

"I am quite sure I recognized the man."

"Who is he?"

"Ray Armitage."

"Well, I do declare!" came the surprised ejaculation. "That caps the climax. Ray Armitage has made mischief enough in this house, it seems to me, without making trouble now between master and mistress."

The speakers passed out of hearing, but Gerald and her father sat motionless for several seconds, looking at each other with a vague horror growing in their eyes. Mr. Trevlyn was pale as death, and shook with suppressed excitement.

"It isn't true—it can't be," Gerald whispered at length, stealing close to him, and dropping her hand upon his arm. "Oh, papa, don't look so heartbroken."

"You don't believe the story?" he said, in a little hollow voice.

"No, no. There is a mistake somewhere. Why, it *can't* be true. Ray and Mrs. Trevlyn are strangers to each other."

"They may have had opportunities for becoming acquainted of which we did not know."

"Not here. I am sure of it."

She looked sick and faint, however, as though some other fear were struggling at her heart. "If Leonie goes out to meet any one it is Dudley Linton and not Ray," had been her thought.

Mr. Trevlyn smothered a groan.

"This is dreadful," he said. "Some facts have recently come to my knowledge that lend an air of probability to this gossip. If I thought Ray Armitage guilty of this treachery, I could—"

He began with violence, but stopped short, and added, in a softened tone:

"I won't say or do anything rash. It will be time enough for that if matters come to the worst. Oh, Gerald," he cried, helplessly, "you don't know how I have loved that woman! She bewitched me from the moment I first beheld her. It would kill me to find her false and unworthy."

"I believe it would," she said, faintly.

She made no attempt to defend Leonie—distrust was too deeply rooted in her own heart for that. When the blow she dreaded fell in all its bitterness, God alone could comfort her poor father. And she felt a secret conviction that nothing could keep it back for long.

"Try to be brave and strong, papa," she whispered, affectionately twining her arms about his neck. "Though everybody else fails, you have always your children. We will never forsake you."

His head fell upon her shoulder. All other passions were lost for the moment in a father's devoted love for his child.

Presently he went up-stairs—to his wife's chamber. Leonie was lying on the couch looking so pallid and still that he gave a frightened start as he beheld her. All thought of reproaches, if any had entered his mind, was gone.

"Are you ill?" he asked, anxiously, bending over her with something of his old tenderness.

"No," she answered, closing her eyes, and turning away her face. "I did not rest well last night, and was trying to sleep when you came in."

"You wish me to go away again?"

"If you please."

He did not leave at once, but stood looking down at her, an expression of bitter anguish on his face. Her tone, so cold and low, and the half-disdainful manner in which she had turned away, wounded him to the quick.

"I am afraid you are not happy, Leonie," he ventured, at length.

A quick shudder ran through her frame.

"Have I ever complained?" she demanded, a little hotly. "You have showered upon me every blessing that money can purchase. Why should I not be happy?"

"We have lived so very quietly since our marriage, Leonie. Perhaps you would prefer a gayer life. It is natural. You are young and full of animal life. There is nothing I would not do to please you, dear. Shall we turn over a new leaf in that respect?"

She did not look up or answer him. Mr. Trevlyn's usually quiet breathing had grown more rapid as he spoke. "Poor thing," he thought. "I won't be hard on her. She must find it very difficult to content herself with a husband twice her own age. I ought to overlook anything that is not absolutely wrong. When she has seen more of the world, the little temptations that assail her now will lose their power."

Coming a little nearer, he touched her hand. There was a moment's hesitation, then she drew her fingers away as though his touch was unendurable. The action hurt him, and yet, when he spoke again, his voice sounded even and calm.

"I have been selfish, Leonie, and kept you to myself more than was right. It shall be so no longer. You are well fitted to adorn society. Shall we begin by attending the opera to-night?"

She started, and pressed her hand to her forehead.

"To-night?"

"Yes," he answered, looking at her in a way that would have frightened her had she seen it. "I notice that the bill is unusually attractive. We must make a beginning, you know."

She seemed confused and troubled.

"To-night?" she repeated, in faltering accents.

"It would give me great pleasure to take you."

There was a moment's breathless silence. Leonie kept her face averted, but she trembled a little. Mr. Trevlyn looked strangely pallid as he stood waiting for her further words.

"Wait," she said at length, rather huskily. "I shall not be well enough to go to-night. I do feel worse than I have acknowledged. Tomorrow it shall be as you decide."

There was nothing more to be said. He drew a long, sighing breath and went out, actually groping his way.

That night he stationed himself at one of the upper windows in the darkness. He had not

long to wait. The first sound that reached his ears was the soft closing of the door leading from Leonie's dressing-room. He stole forward a few steps and glanced into the corridor. She was there, a crimson shawl drawn over her head, making her way toward the staircase. Her face looked strangely pale and drawn.

The wretched man staggered back and sunk helplessly into a chair. He scarcely breathed—he had no strength to move. How long this lasted he could not have told afterward; but at last he roused himself with a start, and followed his wife down-stairs, into the open air.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE GROUNDS.

*We are innocent; how have we fallen
Into this circle of mishap and guilt?*

—COLERIDGE.

MR. TREVLIN was not the only person who beheld Leonie steal silently from the house that night. Gerald had been wrought to a high pitch of nervous excitement by the conversation she had overheard early in the day, and as the hours wore on, she made up her mind if a clandestine meeting was held that night, to be a witness to it.

In spite of what the gossiping servants had said, she still clung to her opinion that it was Dudley Linton, and not Ray Armitage, her father's wife went to meet.

She was sitting in a dusky corner of the veranda when Leonie came out and stole past without seeing her. The moon was at its full, illuminating the grounds with almost the brilliancy of noonday. The instant Leonie disappeared in the shrubbery, Gerald rose to follow her.

At a little distance from the house were several diverging paths. Arrived at this point, Gerald found herself at a loss, and after a moment's hesitation took one at random. She had not followed it far when a step sounded close by, and, on turning, she found herself confronted by a man—not Linton, as she had more than half-expected, but Ray Armitage himself.

She drew back a step, for the encounter gave her quite a shock. A disagreeable doubt flashed upon her mind instantly. Ray's face, upon which the moonlight shone clearly, looked troubled and agitated. He appeared at a decided disadvantage.

"How did you come here?" she demanded, in a rather sharp tone of voice.

"Don't be angry, Gerald," he said, half-entreatingly. "I will go away directly if my presence is unwelcome."

"Why are you here?" she repeated.

"Must I tell you?"

"I shall be greatly displeased if you do not."

The tone was cold and resentful. Glancing at his dress, she observed that he wore a long, muffling cloak, and his hair was drawn low over his eyes. He answered perfectly to the description given by the servant girl of the man Mrs. Trevlyn was accustomed to meet clandestinely.

"After all, I may have wronged Dudley in my thoughts," she said to herself, feeling quite bewildered.

Ray Armitage, meanwhile, had suddenly, with a long-drawn breath, laid his hand upon a trellis near by as if to steady himself.

"I will speak freely, since you desire it," he said, in a trembling voice. "I came this way in the hope of seeing you, Gerald."

"Me! Of seeing me?" she exclaimed.

"Yes. Your father has forbidden me the house, and I have no way of communicating with you. To banish myself altogether from your vicinity is a greater sacrifice than I am able to make."

She stared at him half-incredulously.

"Have you ever been here before of an evening?"

"Oh, yes," he replied. "Of late I come nearly every night."

"And do you mean to say that I am the magnet that draws you to this place?"

"What else could it be?" he replied, passing his hand quickly across his forehead. "I know you despise me for such weakness, but I am powerless to resist it. Though your troth is pledged to another, and you can never be anything to me, you must know as well as I do how passionately I love you—"

"Hush!" she cried, putting up her hand to stop him. "No more of that. I will not listen."

"Forgive me. It was you who called out the words—but I should not have uttered them."

Such a look of hopeless misery settled upon his face that she could not help pitying him. After all, fate had been very unkind to him in more ways than one.

"I don't see that these night visits can be any

comfort to you," she said, in softened accents. "I hope they will be discontinued."

"It was enough if I only caught a glimpse of you through the window. To speak to you, and meet you face to face like this, is happiness indeed."

A faint color crept up on her cheek.

"Poor Ray! my poor friend," she said, "I am not worthy to be loved so unselfishly. What can I do to recompense it?"

"Nothing," he answered, hoarsely, a passionate tremor seizing him all at once. "It does not matter. I have grown accustomed to my lot, and can bear it. But oh, don't deny me the comfort of loving on, though it must be hopelessly!"

His emotion affected her strangely. Tears rose in her eyes, and it was with difficulty she restrained herself from dropping her head upon his shoulder.

"I am sorry for you, Ray—you deserve better than you get. But love cannot be compelled. For your own sake you must try to forget me."

"It is impossible," he answered, sadly. "But I will promise not to distress you again with my folly."

There was a pause, during which Gerald's thoughts had time to go back to the question that troubled her. At length she looked up and said quickly:

"Do you ever meet any one when you come here of an evening?"

"No," he replied. "Of course I try to avoid being seen. If I hear any one walking in the grounds, I secrete myself until they have passed."

"My father's wife often wanders here at this hour."

"I know it. Several times she has nearly discovered me. To-night she passed so near that her dress almost touched me."

"Which way did she go?"

"Toward the lane at the foot of the grounds."

"Did you never speak to her?" she asked, looking at him curiously.

"Certainly not. I have no acquaintance with Mrs. Trevlyn, and should not presume to do that."

He seemed to speak truly. Gerald took his hand and held it in hers a moment.

"Now you must go away," she said, in a gentle voice. "It is not best that you should come this way again. My father would be very angry if he knew of these visits. Go, and try hard to forget me. It is all that remains to be done."

For some moments after he disappeared Gerald remained standing where he had left her. Her heart beat with its old suffocating bitterness. Ray's denial of any acquaintance with Leonie drove her back to the former conviction—namely, that Dudley Linton was the man Mrs. Trevlyn met secretly.

She had turned to walk on when a limping step came down the path. The next instant Garnet's deformed figure loomed in the moonlight.

"Heavens! What are you doing here?" Gerald exclaimed, in a startled voice.

The child drew back with a sullen gesture.

"I have a right to come into the grounds if I please. It is not your business to interfere."

"You should be in the house. The night damps are not good for you."

"They'll do me no harm for once," came the shrill answer. "I had an object in coming out, and I shall not return until the end in view is accomplished."

The little vixen limped away, leaving Gerald rooted to the spot. Was the whole world being turned topsy-turvy all at once?

An interval passed—it may have lasted ten minutes, or only as many seconds. But it seemed a very long time to Gerald. Suddenly a strange sound broke the solemn silence of the night—the report of a pistol, loud, clear, sharp and startlingly near by.

CHAPTER IX.

FATAL LOVE.

*You are my fate
And in a shape more fearfully resistless
My evil angel could not stand before me.*

—SCOTT.

LEONIE, on leaving the house, had made her way directly to a small octagonal wooden building, near the lawn, that did duty as a summer-house. It was situated in the most retired portion of the grounds, and though still in a good state of preservation had almost fallen into disuse by the family.

After glancing all round, Leonie was preparing to knock at the stout oaken door when it suddenly opened from within and a firm, resolute hand drew her across the threshold. The

next instant she stood confronting Dudley Linton in the lonely place.

The moonlight streamed in through the shutterless windows, revealing each face clearly to the other. Both looked troubled and agitated, but there was a feverish restlessness in the man's manner that betokened a mental crisis. His fingers shook as he closed the door and again secured its fastenings.

"You are late to-night," he said, in a complaining voice.

Dropping the shawl from her yellow hair Leonie drew it round her as though struck by a sudden chill.

"It was not safe to come sooner," she said. "I felt tempted to remain away altogether. Dudley, this is the very last time we must meet like this."

"The last time!"

"Think how wicked it is for us to hold these stolen interviews! I am filled with shame and remorse. I have come again and again because you insisted on seeing me. But I shall come no more."

She spoke in a tone of quiet decision that left no room to doubt her purpose. Dudley drew back with an angry cry.

"Do you think I will give you up altogether?" he said, between his teeth. "Never! You belong to me rather than to this other man. Did I not love you first?"

"Was it love?" she said, bitterly. "Please bear in mind how ready you were to forsake me."

"Don't bring that up!" he cried. "Have I not cursed my own folly again and again? I don't know what ever tempted me to leave you. My best love was always given to you, and always will be. I thought you had forgiven the wrong I did you?"

"Yes, I have forgiven—but not forgotten it."

"I have been a villain, Leonie—I know that as well as you do," he said, huskily. "I deserve to be punished for deceiving you so wickedly. Oh, why did you put it out of my power to make the only reparation possible under the circumstances?"

Her eyes shot out a sudden light; the words had stirred within her a sudden passion of excitement.

"Hush, Dudley. You go too far. You shall not reproach me with a fault that rests wholly with yourself. Who drove me to the verge of madness—almost to suicide? Take care."

"It makes me frantic to think of having lost you."

"Well, it can't be helped now. You and I must bear our lot submissively. We have only ourselves to blame. It would be better if we never saw each other after to-night. No good can come of these meetings."

"How can you say that?" he cried, excitedly. "Oh, you must have changed wonderfully, Leonie! Is it possible that you no longer find pleasure or consolation in my society?"

A quick sob broke from her.

"Even so," she answered. "I never come here without thinking how grievously I am wronging my noble, generous husband. Oh, you do not know how I despise myself for such treachery! But my mind is made up—this shall continue no longer."

He grew deathly pale, and seemed to catch his breath. The anguish of that momentation for much. It was quite true that all his old, passionate love for Leonie had revived. The very thought that she was lost to him forever helped to quicken the passion that had been lying dormant so long. His was one of those natures that obstacles incite to greater activity than ever. Had Leonie never married, it is probable he would have forgotten her in a year, and contented himself with Gerald.

But it was quite another matter when he found her the wife of a rich and influential gentleman. He awakened all at once to a new appreciation of the woman he had so basely deceived and forsaken. She became desirable above all womankind. He bitterly regretted his folly in not having made her his wife in very truth, while the opportunity was open to him. At the present moment any sacrifice would not have seemed too great for such a consummation.

"Are you really resolved to see me no more?" he said, with an effort. "This is cruel when you know how passionately I love you. How am I to live without you?"

He made an excited forward movement, but she suddenly put up both hands to keep him away.

"Hush!" she cried. "There has been too much of this talk between us. I have been weak and yielding, but you will find me so no

longer. At last I realize what is due the generous man who has made me his wife. Never again will I be guilty of an act that can cause him a moment's pang, or bring the least reproach upon his name."

There was a pause, during which Dudley stood looking at her, and breathing heavily. He had come to this meeting resolved to urge her to fly with him, and risk everything for such happiness as they could expect to find under conditions so inimical. Was the end to be like this?

While they stood thus, in silence, a footstep suddenly sounded outside, coming directly toward the summer-house. Leonie turned to the nearest window and looked out.

"It is my husband," she gasped, in a dismayed voice; "and he is coming here."

"Curse him!"

"Good God! What shall I do? All is lost if he finds me with you. He already suspects something."

At this instant the latch rattled, but the door was held in position by its fastenings. Then an imperative knock sounded on its panels, and Mr. Trevlyn said, sternly:

"Open the door to me, Leonie. I insist."

Her heart beat fiercely. She turned her eyes in terror on her companion.

"He saw me at the window," she whispered. "Nothing can save us now."

A muttered oath broke from Dudley's lips. He looked fierce and angry enough for anything. Glancing quickly round the room, he saw that the lower sash of the window in the rear had been taken out, leaving free passage in that direction. The sight gave him new hope and courage.

Touching Leonie's hand, he pointed to the open window. "I shall go out there," he said, very low. "Don't be afraid. The moment I am gone you must slip back the bolts. Deny everything—that is your only chance. Your husband cannot prove that you were not here alone."

She watched him as if fascinated while he stole softly over the floor. He was dressed precisely as Ray Armitage had been—that is, he wore a slouched-hat and a long cloak that thoroughly disguised his figure. It had been his custom to come to these secret interviews dressed in this fashion.

His garments scarcely rustled. Slipping silently over the sill, he looked back and kissed his hand to the poor trembling soul who watched his retreat, then disappeared.

She had just strength enough left to slip back the rusty bolts. When the door swung open and her husband stood looking down at her, a strange ashen pallor upon his face, she could not utter a word. It seemed an eternity before he spoke.

"Leonie," he said, "what are you doing here?"

She did not answer him, but drew back, panting like a suffocated thing. Something in the way he looked at her made her wish herself dead.

"The door was fast—~~with~~ with you when I knocked at it. Who is it that you delight to meet at this lonely hour and place? Tell me, Leonie."

His eyes had swept the dreary room, lingering a moment on the open window, then wandered back and fastened themselves mercilessly upon her face.

"Why don't you speak?" he said, in a hard, panting whisper. "I know so much already it would be a pity to suppress the missing links."

At last she found utterance, but her voice sounded hoarse and unnatural.

"Kill me! In mercy's name, put me out of my misery. It is greater than I can bear."

She flung herself forward, and would have clasped his knees, but he motioned her away.

"One word—the villain's name!" he slowly uttered. "Do not seek to withhold it."

"Spare me. I am not so vile as you seem to think."

"The name," he persisted.

She dropped her head with an air of dogged resolution.

"I will not speak it."

"You must. I have a right to know what gentleman is so highly favored by my wife."

"How can I? You intend to murder him?"

"Why should you think that? Have I not been kind and forbearing with you? I remembered your youth and inexperience, and was ready to overlook almost any folly of which you might be guilty. But there is one crime that Heaven itself cannot pardon. What can you expect?"

She flung up her white hands desperately. His face was frightful to behold.

"For God's sake don't look at me like that!

You think worse of me than I deserve. I have tried to be true to you, my husband—I have indeed. Believe me! believe me!"

"Will you speak the name I am waiting to hear?" he demanded, in a sharp, hissing voice.

"Never!"

He swung slowly on his heel and went out.

"Very well. I shall endeavor to discover it without your assistance."

Leonie crouched on the floor with her face hidden in her hands. She heard his step recede—pause an instant—then turn heavily back. What was his purpose now? Must she go through the terror and torture of being catechised again?

The bare possibility was maddening, and starting to her feet she prepared to fly from the accursed spot.

CHAPTER X.

WAS IT A MURDER?

MAL. Thou wretched thing of blood!
How came Antonio by his death?

Bos. I know not how.
—DUCHESS OF MALFI.

WE must now return to Geralda.

The sound of the pistol-shot that aroused her from the bewildered state in which she had been left by Garnet's sudden appearance in the garden, had filled her mind with indescribable terror. Though she believed he was at that moment in the house, her thoughts at once reverted to her father. She did not know what she dreaded, but the conviction that some dreadful calamity had occurred was instantly present with her.

The report came from the direction of the summer-house. Geralda sprang into the path, but her heart throbbed wildly with terror, and her limbs trembled to such an extent that she was unable to advance another step.

While she stood thus, there was the sound of flying footsteps, and Leonie came hurrying up the path. She looked like a specter. The curve and color were gone from her face, her eyes were wild, and her hair fell loose and neglected about her shoulders. The crimson shawl she wore trailed the ground uncared for, and she was wringing her hands hysterically.

Geralda caught her arm as she attempted to fly past, and held her firmly.

"What is it?" she said, in a whisper. "What has happened?"

"Nothing! I—I—don't know. For mercy's sake do not keep me here." And, shuddering convulsively, Leonie made a weak effort to break away.

But Geralda would not let her go.

"Something dreadful has taken place," she said, a hard look coming over her features all at once. "You must come with me and find out what it is."

"Where?"

"To the summer-house."

Leonie struck the palms of her hands together with a terrible cry.

"Not there!" she said, in a husky whisper. "Oh, be merciful and spare me!"

The abject terror expressed in looks and words struck a sudden chill to Geralda's heart. An expression of savage determination settled upon her face.

"Why should you not go with me to the summer-house?" she said. "You shall. Come now—come quickly."

Leonie offered no further resistance. She seemed incapable of doing so. She turned mechanically, and suffered Geralda, whose strength had fully come back, to drag her along the path.

Lying on the steps of the summer-house they found what they were seeking. At first it looked like a dark blotch in the moonlight; then they saw it was a man's recumbent figure; and, finally, as they bent over it, the cold, still, pallid face of Robert Trevlyn met their horrified gaze.

Geralda uttered no audible cry—it died upon her lips. Her hand fell from Leonie's arm, and she knelt beside her father, touching his pulse, then his heart. Still, awfully still!—not even the faintest throb could be discerned! Scarcely knowing what she did, she next laid one hand on his temple. Something warm trickled over it—blood! At that she screamed out suddenly, and flung herself on the senseless body.

"Oh, my father!" she cried, pressing her lips to his cheek. "Not dead? Oh, no! Oh, no!"

At that moment there came a low, moaning sound, and something stirred in the grasses just beyond the spot where the dead man lay. It was Garnet, looking wild, haggard and terrible.

She sat up and glared all around like a panther. "It's over," she cried, shrilly. "You've killed him between you! Now I hope you are content. Look there—you've killed him. It has even come to that. You've killed him, and killed me, too!"

Then, with a terrible cry, such as a wild beast might have uttered, she fell back again, dashing her head against the ground and tearing up the grass by its roots.

Leonie, in the meantime, had not said a word. Even the sight of her husband lying dead before her, scarcely gave her a second shock. The door of the summer-house stood open, and she sat down heavily on the threshold. Her breathing had been hoarse and hurried from the first, and she shook with strange shuddering. There was no visible change, she breathed and trembled after beholding this awful sight precisely as before.

In a few moments the servants came hurrying to the spot. The sound of a pistol-shot in the grounds at that hour, had been quite sufficient to alarm them, especially when it was discovered that neither their master nor any member of his family, was to be found in the house.

Dudley Linton made his appearance at almost the same instant. He came down the path from the direction of the street, and looked singularly nervous and flurried. He wore a dress suit of plain black, and a soft hat of light-colored felt; but no cloak or wrap of any kind. Singularly enough, despite the horror and anguish of that moment, Geralda noticed both his manner and dress.

"Oh, this is dreadful," he cried, in a husky voice, as soon as he fully comprehended the situation. "How could it have happened?"

"Oh, they've killed him between them," said Garnet, dashing her hands against the ground in a paroxysm of ungovernable passion. "I knew they would. But they shall suffer for it. Papa's death shall not go unavenged. I pray God to send upon them the torments of the damned! If I die, too—and I know I shall—I'll haunt them night and day and give them no rest until they find it in the grave."

"What do you mean, Garnet? Who has done this?"

"You, and you, and you!" she shrieked, with frightful vehemence, tossing her long arms wildly about. "You are all bad and wicked alike. His blood is on your heads, and mine soon will be. Blood! blood! blood!"

With this maniacal cry on her lips, the strange child fell back all at once, pallid and rigid as a corpse.

Dudley turned shudderingly to Geralda.

"I—I—do not understand this strange scene," he faltered. "I was coming to make you an evening visit, and the report of a pistol startled me while yet in the street. I knew it was in these grounds, and turned this way on entering at the gate. Oh, what does it mean, Geralda? Has an accident occurred, or—or— Good God, I don't know how to speak it, but I fear that poor Mr. Trevlyn may have tampered with his own life!"

She slowly raised herself to a sitting posture, and looked at him as though her powers of mind and body were all benumbed.

"I cannot explain," she said. "I know nothing. It seems like a horrible dream. My poor father lies here voiceless and still. Oh, may God be merciful to us all!"

Dudley came nearer, after a moment's hesitation, and leaned over as though he would have raised the dead man's head. It was then that Leonie seemed to rouse herself for the first time. Making an irresistible forward movement, she struck down his outstretched hands with one angry blow.

"Don't touch him!" she panted, with strained breath and dilated eyes. "You shall not. I won't permit it."

He looked at her as if bewildered. There was something in her face that caused him to recoil a step. The words had broken from her lips involuntarily, it seemed.

"Robert Trevlyn was my friend," he stammered. "I don't know why I should be kept away from his poor, senseless body. But it shall be as you wish, of course. The servants can bear him to the house."

A sad procession formed soon afterward. Dudley walked before it with uncovered head, and four strong men carried on their shoulders all that was mortal of poor Robert Trevlyn. Geralda and Leonie followed, keeping far apart. They seemed to avoid even looking at each other.

Garnet was carried to the house afterward. When they returned for her, she lay as though she had fallen in a fit, her eyes turned up, her

muscles rigid, her cheeks blanched to the ashen hue of death. For a moment it was thought she had actually followed her father to the other world.

"Poor thing," said a sympathetic voice, as the child was laid on the bed in her own chamber, "this blow will kill her. And it's a mercy if it does. She'll find no one to bear with her as her father did."

Garnet heard the words, and started up suddenly, her hair flying loose over her shoulders, her eyes burning with a strange, awful light.

"Don't speak of him!" she cried, shrilly. "I can't bear it. I won't! I wish I was dead already. Why are you all here to torture me? This is insufferable. Go away, go, go! I will be left alone. Go, I say!"

There was something so wicked and furious in her looks that everybody fell back from the bed. After glaring about her an instant, she dashed her head against the pillow and began grinding her teeth and howling like a little demon.

When Mrs. Webb was the only person left in the chamber, she sat up again, and pushing back the tangled locks from her face, beckoned the housekeeper to approach.

"I'm going to be ill," she said, in a husky whisper. "I feel it in my bones. And it won't be any common illness, I can tell you, Mrs. Webb. In a few minutes I shall be raving like a Bedlamite. There's a terrible burning here and here!" And she pressed her little wasted hands to her head and heart, alternately.

"What can I do?" said the housekeeper, really terrified. "Let me send for the doctor."

"The doctor! Don't you dare do it. I'll strike him in the face if he comes nigh me. I'll have nobody here—nobody."

"But we cannot leave you to suffer alone."

"Yes, you shall! I want to suffer—I want to die! Then, perhaps—it is the only thing that—"

She checked herself suddenly, and for a time muttered just under her breath.

"Let me tell you what you are to do, Mrs. Webb," she said, rallying, at length. "You are to guard my door while I am delirious, and let no one pass in. I won't have people about watching and listening. You can sit in the corridor outside, if you like. But no one else must be there—mind that. Will you do as I wish?"

"Certainly, if necessary—"

"Promise me!" shrieked Garnet, fixing her terrible eyes on the housekeeper's face.

"Well, I do promise."

The child fell back at that, as though relieved, and again began to mutter incoherently.

In the meantime a physician had been sent for—as a mere matter of form, of course—to examine the dead man. The body had been laid on a couch in the study. Dudley Linton, who felt compelled to remain the night through, took it upon himself to direct what should be done. There was no one else to act in this sad emergency.

He let out the physician himself when the examination was over. Just as he turned back his glance fell upon a pallid, shrinking figure near the study door. It was Leonie. He was struck at once by the peculiar glitter in her large blue eyes.

"Why are you here?" he hastily inquired.

At first she half-turned, with a gesture of horror and repulsion; then seemed to force herself, by a powerful effort, to remain and speak.

"Is—there no hope?" she said, brokenly.

"None?"

He shook his head.

"Death must have been instantaneous. The poor man was shot through the brain."

She passed her hands across her eyes.

"Great God!"

That was all she said. Dudley looked at her a moment, then said in an agitated whisper:

"Leonie, have you thought how Mr. Trevlyn's death changes your position? You are free now—free!"

She did not speak. After a moment's hesitation he drew nearer, and dropped his hand upon her heaving shoulder.

"Do you understand? It would seem that Heaven itself has interfered in our behalf. We can be happy—no living man stands between us now."

Shaking off his hand, she broke away with a gasp of horror.

"But a dead man does," she panted.

CHAPTER XI.

THE AGONY OF SUSPENSE.

Uncertainty!
Fell demon of our fears. The human soul
That can support despair, supports not thee.
—MALLET.

THOUGH a messenger was sent for Ray Armitage before midnight, some difficulty had been encountered in finding him, and it was nine o'clock of the next morning when he arrived.

Geralda sat alone in the drawing-room. She was very pale, but looked calmer than the young man had expected to find her. Indeed he was by far the most agitated of the two. His face wore a haggard expression, and the hand he extended shook as with palsy.

"It is dreadful to be recalled like this—dreadful!" he exclaimed. "I would sooner these doors had remained closed against me forever than enter them under such circumstances."

She gasped once or twice, but no words fell from her dry and burning lips.

"I have suffered much since this terrible news came to me, Geralda. My guardian died disliking and distrusting me as much as ever! It is an agonizing thought. To the last he believed me a thief, a perjured villain, I know not what! Oh, for one clear hour in which my innocence might have been established!"

"Too late," she said, controlling herself with an effort. "My poor papa has gone to a place where all things are clear to him—where the mysteries of this world are every one explained."

"Then he can read my heart aright now, and knows how bitterly his suspicions wronged me."

"True. I never doubted you, Ray. You believe that?"

"Yes," he answered, with a grateful look.

Ray, it appeared, had heard but a garbled account of the calamity. Now, as they discussed it more fully, he learned the particulars, as they were known to Geralda, for the first time.

"Why, I was told that a simple accident had occurred," he exclaimed with bated breath and pallid lips. "That Mr. Trevlyn was carelessly handling a revolver when it exploded, killing him instantly. Your version is so different that it fills my mind with the most distressing doubts."

"The whole affair is involved in mystery. I cannot think my father would tamper with his own life. And yet—and yet—it must have been that, or—murder!"

She uttered the word in a thrilling whisper; then, before he could speak, fixing her eyes earnestly on his face, she added:

"You were in the grounds last night, Ray. Which way did you go on leaving me?"

"Back to the city."

"Immediately?"

"Yes. I had seen you, my only object in coming at all, and had no occasion to linger. I let myself out at the gate within five minutes after we parted."

"Did you hear the report of the pistol?"

"No; at least I was too far away to notice it."

She sighed. "I hoped you might be able to throw a little light upon this mystery, Ray."

There was a moment's pause, then she came a little closer. Her face had suddenly changed—hardened and gathered resolution.

"I have a question to ask," she said, abruptly.

"That is why you were sent for. I never closed my eyes last night. I was trying to nerve myself for what seemed inevitable. Please attend closely. I wish to know what is usually done in a case like this where—where—there is suspicion and uncertainty—where a foul wrong may have been done—where one is driven frantic and desperate by doubts, fears and suspicions that cannot be shaken off?"

She had begun calmly enough, but her words gathered vehemence as she proceeded, and at the last she clasped her hands to her temples with a wild and bitter cry.

Ray felt his pulses start. He had not been prepared for the outbreak, and could only stammer out a few halting words.

"What—what do you mean, Geralda?"

"Tell me!" she panted, without giving the slightest heed to his question. "I have no one else to advise me. You know what I mean—you must know. This terrible uncertainty is killing me. I would rather know the truth, however bad. How did my father come by his death? The terrible question is burning its way into my brain. It scorches my heart, dries up my breath. I must find an answer to it—must and will!"

She laid hold of his arm in her excitement, and clung to it with convulsive shudders. All she had endured during the past few hours, was at that moment written in her face.

The young man shook under her touch, but he could not help pitying her. Striving to speak calmly, he said:

"It will be necessary to call in the police, I suppose, if you are resolved to make a rigid inquiry into the matter."

"The publicity—the exposure—how can I ever bear it?"

"A private detective might be employed," he suggested. "Upon the whole I am not sure but that would be the better way."

A quick exclamation broke from her lips.

"Yes, yes, that will do—a private detective! Men employed in that capacity are expected to be silent and secret as the grave, are they not? They can be trusted? They work for their employer's interests alone, do they not?"

"Certainly."

She dropped her hands, and seemed to deliberate a moment. The suggestion had evidently pleased her. At length she said:

"Do you think you could find the right sort of person, and send him here, Ray? I would like the investigation to begin at once, before anything can be covered up. In that way the truth can more readily be brought to light. It is the truth I want—the truth, however dark and horrible it may be."

"Will you tell me what you suspect, Geralda?"

"I cannot," she said, shivering, and turning her face aside. "Don't ask it. I may be wrong, altogether. I hope it will so appear. I am very wretched, Ray, but must keep a part of my trouble to myself. That is all. Send the man at once, and put me out of this misery."

An inquest was held later in the day. A mere farce it proved to be. Dudley Linton managed everything, and managed so extremely well that no suspicion of foul play crept to the surface. The few inquiries made were superficial in the extreme. A verdict of "Death by accidental shooting," was rendered.

Shortly after the conclusion of the inquest, a slender, plainly-dressed man, of about forty, made his appearance at the house door. Mrs. Webb answered his ring, and, in a low, respectful voice, he asked permission to see Miss Geralda Trevlyn.

"Impossible," the housekeeper answered, with decision. "Miss Trevlyn is in great distress, and cannot grant interviews to strangers at the present time."

"I beg your pardon—the lady expects me. I cannot go away without seeing her."

Mrs. Webb stared. Before she could say another word, Geralda's voice was heard calling to her from the landing.

"Bring that person to my private sitting-room, Mrs. Webb. I will see him there."

They found her waiting just within the door. She looked very grave and quiet, and after giving the man a quick glance, sent Mrs. Webb away, and they were shut in together.

"Well?" she said, very quietly.

The man drew nearer.

"I am Mr. Hine," he said. "I was sent here by Mr. Armitage. He told me to inquire for you."

A quick tremor ran over her, but that was the only sign of unusual emotion she betrayed.

"You understand, of course, what is wanted of you, Mr. Hine? Mr. Armitage explained?"

"Yes, madam."

"That is well," she said. "I am saved a very disagreeable task. It is not pleasant for me to dwell upon what has occurred, as you may readily imagine." Here her voice broke a little. "You must go on and work as well as you can by yourself."

The detective gravely nodded.

"I have but one direction to give," she added. "The investigation must be made as quietly as possible, and any facts that may come to light are to be reported to me alone."

"I understand. You can trust me, madam."

The night passed; and at ten o'clock the next day Mr. Hine appeared to make his first report. When he again entered the private room upstairs where Geralda preferred to receive him, he carried a large bundle under his arm.

"My work is well begun, Miss Trevlyn," he said, and was beginning to unroll the bundle when she stopped him.

"One moment," she uttered, almost in a whisper. "First of all I desire to know what theory you have formed. How did my father meet his death?"

He glanced hesitatingly at her white, working face.

"I will give you my present opinion if you wish. But it will only distress you to hear it."

"No matter. I have schooled myself to endurance."

"Appearances prove conclusively to my mind that he was—murdered!"

That terrible word caused her to stagger backward and lose her breath.

"Go on," she said, after a minute's silence. "Give me your reasons for thinking as you do."

"That can be briefly done. In the first place I fail to see any motive strong enough to tempt a man like Mr. Trevlyn to take his own life. That he met his death by an accident is still more absurd. On either of these suppositions, the fatal weapon would have been found clutched in his grasp. But such was not the case. I learn, on inquiry, that he held nothing whatever in his hand when his body was found. The inference to be drawn from these facts is very palpable."

"Go on," she said again, in a little hollow voice. "Tell me what other discoveries you have made."

His only reply was to spread out the bundle before her eyes. A long black cloak, a broad-brimmed felt hat—that was all it contained. But Geraldine drew back suddenly with a shrinking gesture. She believed it to be the identical disguise Ray Armitage had worn that fatal night when she encountered him in the grounds!

"Why do you bring these things here?" she sharply demanded. "What have they to do with the point at issue?"

"A great deal, it may be."

"Where did you find them?"

"In a thicket of evergreens near the gate. They may have lain there a night or two—not longer. Though quite damp, there is no appearance of mildew. Miss Trevlyn, I believe these garments have been worn as a disguise, and when we know by whom we are far on the road toward the solution of the mystery that perplexes us!"

"Ah!" she ejaculated, growing dizzy and sick with the suspicion his words suggested. Could it be that Ray—No, no, impossible! She would not think it, even for a moment.

"You may leave these things with me, Mr. Hine," she said, at length. "I will see what can be done to find an owner for them."

"But, madam—"

She interrupted him with a gesture of unusual haughtiness.

"Please bear in mind that you are working in my interests alone, and are to be guided by my wishes."

"Very well," he said, rather sullenly. "Perhaps you will wish to take charge of this as well? I found it lying in the grass several yards distant from the spot where the dead man lay."

Producing a small revolver from an inner pocket, he laid it on the table at Geraldine's elbow.

The poor girl held her hand tightly upon her beating heart. She had seen the revolver before—in her father's possession. She knew it by the fanciful trimmings of silver that ornamented it. Ah, what dastard's hand abstracted it to be used for such a purpose?

With a long, deep sigh she sat down and covered her eyes, as if to shut out from her sight the horrible thing, and all the torturous images it evoked.

"I—I—cannot talk any more upon this subject at present," she said, at length, in a hoarse, troubled voice. "Please go away, Mr. Hine. But you may leave the revolver. And pray, say nothing to any one of the discoveries you have made."

He bowed gravely, but with a dissatisfied expression on his face, and withdrew.

Garnet's chamber was on the opposite side of the corridor, a little lower down. She had kept her bed since her father's death, delirious most of the time, though with lucid intervals. It was during one of these seasons of sanity that, lying motionless on her couch, she heard the detective leave her sister's room. Starting up in bed, she abruptly addressed Mrs. Webb, who happened to be with her at the time.

"Who's that?" she inquired, not recognizing the step.

"A stranger who has some business with Miss Geraldine."

"What business?" demanded the little imp, fixing her strange eyes on the housekeeper's face. "Tell me. I think you know."

It happened that Mrs. Webb *did* know—at least she divined the truth. She had watched the man prowling about the house and grounds, and his manner and actions were amply sufficient to set her on the right track. But would it be well to disclose her suspicions to the child?

While she hesitated, the question was settled by Garnet herself. Sitting up rigid and white, she glared at the woman like a wild-cat.

"Don't put me off," she gasped. "I won't be

deceived—you hadn't better try it. The man is a policeman or something of that sort, is he not? Answer me. I *will* be replied to, when I question you."

Mrs. Webb could not well do otherwise.

"Yes, I think he is a detective," she said, wondering at the child's sagacity. "But what led you to think so, when you have not even seen him?"

"Oh, I felt certain some one would be called in." She sunk back on the pillows, and lay blinking a moment. "Mrs. Webb," she broke out, suddenly, at length, "go and bring that man here. I wish to speak with him."

"But, child—"

"Go!" she repeated so furiously, and with such a ghastly look upon her face that the housekeeper dared not disobey.

When Mr. Hine stood beside the couch, presently, looking the least bit surprised at the unexpected summons, Garnet sent Mrs. Webb out of the room, and the minute the door closed, turned her terrible eyes on the detective's face.

"Are you not here to investigate the mystery of poor papa's death?" she inquired.

The question was put too directly to be evaded.

"Yes," he replied.

"I knew it. My sister called you in—it was like her. She feels that there was nothing accidental in papa's death, and has made it your business to discover whether it is a case of suicide or murder."

"Yes."

"Well," she said, slowly, a strange expression of malice and cunning kindling in her eyes, "let me save you a deal of trouble by making a simple revelation. Papa was murdered—and I can tell you by whom!"

CHAPTER XII.

DISTRACTING DOUBTS.

Our acts our angels are, or good or ill
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.

—FLETCHER.

MR. HINE had met with many strange experiences while following his chosen profession, but this promised to be the most remarkable of them all. He stared into the withered, witch-like face of the child, well-nigh speechless with amazement.

"You!" he gasped. "You can tell this?"

"Certainly," she answered, with a strange smile. "Don't glare at me so like an idiot—I'm not attempting to mislead you. I was about that wretched night, like everybody else, and saw more than some people imagine. I have been ill and delirious much of the time since, or my story would have been told before."

The professional instinct is strong in all men. Involuntarily the detective pressed closer to the couch, looking oddly like a sleuth-hound with the first scent of its victim in its nostrils.

"Your story?" he repeated, in a low voice.

"What is your story?"

"I can tell it in half a dozen words. My poor father was murdered—shot down in cold blood!"

"Be careful what you say, miss."

She fairly gnashed her teeth at him.

"Do you think I have not sufficiently weighed my words?" she cried, furiously. "That only shows what a fool you are. But there!—I won't get angry with one like you. Believe me or not, I'm telling what I know to be the facts. I stood near enough to see the deed done, but could not interfere. I was even unable to warn papa. My tongue was frozen to the roof of my mouth, my feet glued to the spot."

"Take care," he said, again. "You might be called upon to testify to all this in a court of law."

"I'm ready to tell it anywhere," she exclaimed, "if the murderer can only be brought to justice by the means."

"Who do you say he is—the murderer?"

"Ray Armitage!"

Mr. Hine drew back a step, and looked at her with cold disdain.

"You are delirious, child, or you would not dare make an accusation so infamous. Armitage, indeed. Even I know him too well to credit for one moment the slanderous charge." And the detective turned angrily away.

"Stop!" she cried after him, in her shrillest accents. "You shall hear me through. Have I not told you that I was a witness to the crime? You shake your head. What! has not my word the slightest weight with you?"

"Not when it seeks to condemn a man like Armitage."

"What is he more than any other man?" she demanded, with contemptuous scorn. "Would you make of him a God, with no evil impulses in his heart?"

"He is, at least, no hardened criminal."

She remained silent a moment, as if struggling with the stormy passions that swept her soul.

"You think there is an absence of motive that might lead to the crime that has been committed," at length she said, sullenly. "But in this matter you show yourself no wiser than in other things. There was always bad blood between papa and that wretch. It has ended as might have been foreseen. Ray began with petty pilferings. He was kept on short allowance while my father acted as his guardian, and that led him to help himself surreptitiously out of papa's desk. Hundreds of dollars were taken from time to time."

"Is that all you have to say against him?"

"By no means. Ray is in love with Geraldine, and papa had forbidden him the house. Don't you realize what a temptation was thus put in his way? My sister is betrothed to Dudley Linton, to be sure, but with papa's opposition withdrawn the wretch may have hoped to win her. Oh, may Heaven confound him! I wish to see him suffer the torment I am enduring at this moment! There isn't an evil in the universe that I would not willingly call down upon his head!"

Her fingers clutched nervously at the bed-clothes, and her eyes burned with a strange fire. She was growing delirious again.

"Calm yourself," said the detective, quietly.

"It is of no use to give way to excitement. I'll leave you now—you may be more reasonable when I see you again."

"Reasonable?" she screamed, throwing herself wildly from side to side. "You are dealing with me exactly as with a whimsical child. I won't submit to it. The charge I make against Ray Armitage deserves to be investigated. It shall be! I will not rest or sleep until proceedings have been begun against him. I won't—"

Mr. Hine broke away in the midst of her ravings, but those shrill, piercing tones followed him down the corridor. He tried to drown them by shutting both hands over his ears. There was something terrible in the child's fury and despair.

Having found Mrs. Webb, he sent her to Garnet's relief, then knocked at the door of the chamber in which his interview with Geraldine had been held. She was still there, sitting precisely as he had left her. Hearing his step, she looked up with a start, and a questioning look.

"Miss Trevlyn," he said, in his grave, quiet tones, "I have just been with your sister. She had a very singular revelation to make, and I think you ought to be told of it."

"Well?"

He went on to relate everything that had occurred. Geraldine's face changed as she listened—something of horror and doubt crept into it—but she did not give way utterly.

"Garnet's ravings do not deserve a moment's consideration," she said, trying to speak calmly. "She always hated Mr. Armitage, and has brought other charges against him, before now, quite as groundless as this one. She is just delirious enough to give free play to the wildest fancies."

"Great harm may be done unless this propensity is checked."

"True. I will endeavor to pacify her."

She went directly to the chamber where Garnet lay, but it was too late to say a word. The child was tossing wildly on her couch, and babbling to herself, unconscious of anything that went on around her.

Geraldine now almost regretted she had ever attempted to investigate the facts connected with her father's sudden death. New complications were arising every hour—the end could not be foretold. Evade the matter as she might, she knew full well that there was some show of evidence to corroborate Garnet's strange story. Her suspicions had been turned in quite another direction at first. But it remained to be seen what motive had influenced Ray to secrete the cloak and hat before leaving the grounds. Until this action was explained, she could not help regarding him with a certain degree of distrust.

Mr. Trevlyn was buried the next day. Garnet was too ill to be present—after raving ceaselessly all night, she had sunk into a stupor at dawn of day, from which nothing could rouse her. Geraldine and Leonie were the only occupants of the family carriage when it rolled in the midst of a long procession to the grave. But they sat as far apart as possible, pale and still, not once speaking or even looking at each other.

On the return home, however, this reserve was suddenly broken by Leonie. Stretching out her arms all at once, she said with a pitiful cry:

"Oh, Geralda, why can we not be friends? Your coldness is killing me. You have not once spoken to me since—since—that dreadful night!"

Geralda drew back with a quick shudder of repulsion. She felt that she should scream if those slender white hands touched so much as a fold of her dress, even.

"I shall endeavor to treat you civilly when others are by to see," she said. "You were his wife—I cannot ignore that fact if I would. Before the world you shall receive the respect your position deserves. More than that you cannot expect."

"I am so wretched—so lonely and wretched," Leonie pleaded, earnestly.

"I don't know how you can come to me for consolation."

"What have I done—oh, what have I done," cried the girl, passionately, "that you turn against me so?"

Geralda made no answer, but there was something in the look she gave Leonie that made the latter stare, and suddenly cover her eyes, as though she could not bear to behold it. So utter silence fell between them once more.

The day, from its beginning, had been dark and overclouded. As night came on, a cold, drizzling rain set in. The wind sobbed and moaned around the house, and tossed the tree-tops like an unquiet spirit.

Geralda, who could not sit still anywhere for a strange restlessness that had come upon her, was in the lower hall, late in the evening, walking up and down, when the door-bell rung, and Ray Armitage entered. He was dripping with wet, and paused in the vestibule to remove his cloak and hat.

"I did not like to leave you alone, this dismal night," he said, catching sight of Geralda's black-robed figure. "Unseasonable as the hour is, I felt that you would be glad to see me."

She did not answer a word, but came close up to him, a strange, puzzled expression on her face. She was not looking at him, however, but at the cloak of which he was divesting himself. She trembled a little, and stood speechless.

"What is it?" he said, at length, struck by her peculiar behavior.

"Is this the same cloak you wore that night I met you in the grounds?"

"Certainly. I have no other. Why do you ask?"

She drew a long, deep, sighing breath.

"Come up-stairs, and I will tell you."

He followed without a word. The pretty little chamber looked bright and inviting, for a tiny fire had been kindled in the grate. Geralda crossed the floor, unlocked a cabinet that stood there, and from the lower shelf took a bundle which she spread open on the table—the cloak and hat that had been left in her charge by the detective.

Ray looked at the articles with simple bewilderment—or was it the feigned coolness of hardened guilt?

"I am more at a loss than ever," he said. "Why do you show me these things?"

"Are they not yours?"

"No," he answered. "I never saw them before. What do you mean?"

"The cloak and hat were found in the grounds after that dreadful night. Remembering how you were dressed when I met you, I had no doubt but they belonged to you."

"Found in the grounds?" he repeated.

"Yes—secreted in one of the thickets."

He dropped his head.

"That is strange. I don't know what to make of it. Do you?" he added, with a sudden earnestness.

She did not reply at once. Her eyes were fixed upon the cloak in a half-fascinated way. She had just observed, for the first time, that it was considerably worn—even threadbare in places. And the garment of which Ray had divested himself, down-stairs, was, she remembered, nearly new!

Somehow the discovery turned her sick, for a moment. She shrunk in horror from following out the thought it suggested.

"No," she said at length, pressing her hand upon her eyes, "I do not know. It is another of that awful night's mysteries. Oh, my God, when will they all be cleared away?"

Ray's countenance changed; an expression of bitter pain and regret swept over it.

"You are not looking well, Geralda. I am afraid you brood too much over your trouble."

"Yes," she said in a husky voice, "I brood over it continually. I shall never have done."

"I suppose it is the uncertainty that makes it so hard to bear. You are kept in a fever of anxiety to learn the real facts connected with your father's death. Try to be patient, my

friend. Mr. Hine will bring the truth to light if any one can."

There was a long pause; Ray seemed to be deliberating with himself.

"This matter of the cloak will bear investigating," he added, at length. "It is certainly a curious coincidence that it should be found just at the present time. There may be some influence at work to which we have no clew."

Geralda's hand had fallen from her eyes—she sat looking at him in silence. "God be merciful to us all!" she cried, suddenly, and turned away her face.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PENNILESS PAINTER.

'Tis an atrocious world!—BULWER.

WE must now turn back for a few moments, to narrate an event or two that occurred somewhat earlier than those we have just been recording.

One clear, cold afternoon in February a very pretty young woman was hurrying breathlessly and somewhat apprehensively along one of the wretched streets that lead from the Five Points toward the river. A squalid, miserable street it was, with want and crime written as a legend upon its black, tumble-down houses and filthy by-ways. Evil-eyed men and women and unkempt children, gathered about the tiny courts and low doorways, turned to stare after the light, neat figure of the young person who went tripping past so airily. She looked singularly out of place in such a scene, and it was thus they bore unwitting testimony to this fact.

She had closely scanned the well-nigh illegible numbers as she went along. All at once she had stopped short, and pressed her hand upon her heart. "This must be the place," she murmured with quickening breath; and with one dash had climbed the rickety steps.

The hall was a bare, neglected place, with a dilapidated staircase leading to the rooms above, but it might have been the grand entrance to a palace for all the difference the young woman could have told at that moment. A wrinkled old hag stood in an open door, near by, and to her the new-comer hastily made her way.

"Do you know," she said, tremulously, "if an artist named Forsyth has rooms in this place?"

"Forsyth!" echoed the woman, sharply. "Yes, that's the name as nearly as I can make it out. Picture painter, ain't he? Ay, that's the chap. Attic, third door to the left."

"Thank you." The pretty young creature was moving hastily on when the woman strode after her.

"Say, now, ma'am," she cried, "do you happen to be a friend or relation of that man's?"

"I am his wife."

"Wife! Lord, no!" starting back a step with a prolonged stare. "Lord, no! I never knew he had one. Wife! Good gracious!"

Something in the woman's tone made Mrs. Forsyth turn and look at her.

"What is it?" she said, faintly. "I think there is something you wish to tell me. Is my husband ill?"

"Well, ma'am, he ain't none too strong and hearty at the present time," came the hesitating answer. "He's been ailing ever since he came here to lodge. You'd better make up your mind to see a change in him, afore goin' up-stairs, ma'am; then it won't come so sudden like. It is—"

Mrs. Forsyth heard no more. She went up one staircase, then another, with flying feet.

"Dick, Dick," she cried, shrilly, at the door of her husband's chamber, then flung herself against it.

The miserable catch gave way, and she was within. What a bare, dreary place it was! No chimney, no fire, no furniture of any sort except a broken chair, a rude box that did duty as table, a painter's easel on which was a half-finished picture, and the wretched straw bed in one corner where the artist himself was lying!

Mrs. Forsyth rushed screaming across the room, and flung herself down beside her husband.

"Oh, Dick, Dick! Oh, my love! Is it thus that I find you?"

A sound that was half-sob, half-groan broke from the poor fellow's lips.

"You, Elsie!" he panted; then he could not utter another word, her kisses so silenced and smothered him.

At last she drew back, and looked at him. The alteration was even greater than had at first appeared. His eyes were sunken, his cheeks thin and hollow, his whole frame emaciated.

It was like confronting the ghost of the man she had come to seek.

"I am not feeling well to-day, and thought I would lie down awhile, Elsie," he said, smiling a poor, pitiful smile, more sorrowful than any outbreak of grief would have been.

Her chest began to heave, but she controlled herself.

"Dick," she said, steadily, "how long have you been like this?"

"A—a—day or two," came the hesitating answer.

"Tell me the truth, Dick. How long?"

"Well, for some weeks."

"What is the matter?"

"I don't know," he said, a sigh, long and deep, breaking from his lips. "My strength seemed to fail all at once, and I have not been able to get strong again."

But, as she glanced round the bare, comfortless room, the riddle was easily read by Elsie Forsyth. The signs of extreme destitution were everywhere. He, her husband, was slowly dying of want and starvation!

"Oh, Dick, why did you never send for me?"

A shadow went over his face.

"Could I bring my wife to a miserable hole like this?" he said, bitterly.

"Don't, Dick. You know I would have endured everything to be with you. Oh, why did you go away and leave me?"

"It was for your own sake I went, Elsie. I knew you would be much more comfortable and happy without me."

A sob rose in her throat, but she choked it back. Laying her cheek against his, she held it there a moment, then turned away and again ran over the inventory of what the wretched attic contained. Not a solitary comfort anywhere!—not a morsel of food save a crust of dry bread that lay beside a cup on the top of the box!

A pair of troubled eyes from the couch of straw, followed her every movement.

"It is a long while since I have been able to earn anything, Elsie," he said, half-apologetically.

"My God! And you have even wanted food!"

She could have wept, but there was no time for tears. Her mind had been made up from the first what to do. Going out quickly she found the landlady, and had a few minutes' conversation with her. Messengers were easily found in that overcrowded place, and when Elsie returned to the attic she took with her a bowl of savory soup and a little wine that had been purchased in the next street. It was pitiful to see how the sick man's eyes lighted up when he saw what she had brought. He took the bowl and ate the soup very slowly, trying thus to conceal his eagerness.

"Oh, Elsie, this is just what I've wanted all day," he said. "I'm glad you thought to send for it."

Her eyes filled.

"Eat it all, Dick. Then I want you to taste this wine."

He did so. Gradually his eyes brightened and a slight flush rose in his cheeks. He sunk back upon the straw with a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"Now tell me how you succeeded in finding your way here, Elsie," he said, holding tightly to her hand.

"By and by. There is something else to be done just now. How do you feel, Dick?"

"Better—very much better."

"Well enough to undertake a short journey?"

"Oh, yes. But," looking at her curiously, "why do you ask that?"

"Because I have hired a room in a more decent neighborhood, and wish to take you there. I have sent for a cab, and it must be at the door by this time. Let me help you to get ready."

This was easily done. He had nothing worth taking away except the half-finished picture and the materials with which he worked. His few belongings could be made into a single bundle.

Richard Forsyth's history was a common one, and yet nothing could be more sad. He had chosen a profession that brings scanty emolument at the beginning. In the season of intoxication that followed the success of a single picture he had made Elsie Berners his wife. A terrible struggle with poverty and privation followed. Elsie's cheek grew pale, her sunny eye lost its brightness. At last, in sheer desperation and despair, Richard had taken her home to the inland village where she had been born, and where her uncle, a well-to-do man who had taken care of her in childhood, still resided. At the time Elsie naturally imagined they were to make her relative a brief

visit; but Richard disappeared during the night, leaving a brief note for his wife, in which his real purpose was made clear.

"I can suffer myself without a murmur," the letter said, "but it kills me to see you wasting away for want of the simple comforts of life. I know your uncle is more than willing to give you a home—he has often said so. Farewell, darling—I go to battle with the world alone. Whether we shall ever meet again, God alone can tell—it will depend upon the measure of success that crowns my efforts. May God guard and shield you forever, my precious wife."

Months had elapsed since then, and now husband and wife were together again for the first time. What Richard Forsyth had suffered during the interval my pen shrinks from portraying; but through everything he had remained steadfast to his purpose of bearing the burden alone. Even in sickness he would not send for his wife, though feeling the need of her gentle presence every day and every hour. But somehow she had managed to trace him, and here she was, ministering to his wants as of old. It seemed like a sudden taste of heaven!

When presently he found himself in a cheerful room, lying on a lounge before a glowing fire, with Elsie kneeling beside him, clasping his worn and wasted hand, all his manhood gave way, and he burst out crying hysterically, like a woman.

"It seems like a dream," he said, in a husky whisper. "I did not expect to enjoy anything like this again."

"This room has been mine ever since I came to New York two weeks ago. I'm glad you like it, Dick."

What a pretty, comfortable place it seemed, compared with his dreary attic! Curtains at the windows, a carpet on the floor, a neat bed in the corner! It all looked very pleasant, indeed, but—could they afford such luxury?

Elsie seemed to divine what was passing in his mind.

"I have a little money, Dick, enough to last until you get up again," she said. "I taught school after you left me, and saved every dollar of my wages. My uncle added a little to the sum, and now I feel quite rich. I knew the time would come when these savings would be needed."

He looked at her wistfully.

"Have you forgiven me, Elsie, for going away and leaving you?"

"I never felt there was anything to forgive," she said, smiling rather sadly.

"It seemed such a cowardly thing to do."

"Nay, in your case it was only heroic. I knew well enough what it cost you to give me up. There was never one hard thought in my heart, Dick—never! I lost no time in repining, but went quietly at work to gather money enough to find you."

"God must have helped you."

"I think He did," she said, gently, "I think He did."

They were both silent a moment. At length Dick said, in a bewildered tone:

"Tell me how you managed it, Elsie. The chances were so against your finding me in that out-of-the-way attic, that it seems little short of a miracle that you succeeded."

"In the first place," she answered, "I went the rounds of all the galleries, everywhere I could find pictures on exhibition or for sale. No one had ever heard of you. Nevertheless, I could not give up the conviction that you were in New York. This morning I was passing along a back street, full of pawnbroker's shops, when I saw some pictures in the window—"

"I was compelled to leave them there," he interrupted, with a sudden flush. "The paltry sum I got for them kept me from starvation."

"One of the pictures was a pretty country scene, a brook with a young girl, her hat full of flowers, crossing on the stones," she went on. "The minute my eyes fell upon it I knew who had painted it, for the girl's face was like mine, Dick, only younger and prettier. I entered, and the pawnbroker gave me your address. Now, you have the whole story. Ah, Dick, that picture had its mission, after all."

"A blessed one," he said, touching his lips to her forehead, "for it brought you to my side again."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FALSE COUSIN.

"You wrought it with consummate guile,
You wrought it by word and by wile."

RICHARD FORSYTH'S illness had been occasioned by exposure and insufficient food, and now that he was comfortably lodged and fed he began to mend rapidly. Before the close of

the second week he was able to sit up all day, and even work a few hours upon his uncompleted picture.

It was a more ambitious subject than he had ever undertaken. A wild, barren, lonesome moor through which a solitary figure seemed to be toiling slowly and painfully, while a lurid sky, presaging storm and danger, bent threateningly above. Poor Dick had literally painted his soul into the picture and it was perfection of its kind. Inspired by his wife's presence and sympathy, he went at the finishing work with renewed enthusiasm. He had christened the scene "The Wanderer."

About this time Elsie undertook a little commission by herself. Going secretly to the pawnbroker's shop she redeemed the paintings—three in number—her husband had left there, and took them to a picture-dealer's on Broadway.

"They are beautifully done," she thought, "and can't help finding purchasers if left in a public place. I will say nothing to Dick until one of them is sold."

She met with something of a rebuff, however. The picture-dealer received her kindly, but manifested no curiosity to see the paintings.

"Are they your own work, madam?" he inquired.

"Oh, no. My husband painted them."

"What name?"

"Richard Forsyth."

The dealer shook his head.

"The name is not known in New York. It is not the character of the work, nowadays, so much as who did it. I am afraid it would be of no use, madam."

"Will you be good enough to look at the pictures?"

He was about to do so when some one spoke his name. A gentleman was loitering in a small alcove to the left screened by crimson curtains. Elsie caught a glimpse of his face and felt instantly she had seen it before, under peculiar circumstances, though she could not tell when or where. It was a striking face, dark and singularly handsome.

"I wish you would consent to receive the paintings," he said to the dealer in a low voice, though every word reached Elsie's ears distinctly. "I will tell you why some other time."

"Very well."

"And be sure to get the young woman's address."

A moment more and the dealer came back to the counter where Elsie was standing. The paintings could be left, he said, and he would make an effort to dispose of them.

The by-play had vexed and puzzled Elsie, but when she thought of Dick, his illness, suffering and poverty, she dared not resent it. Far better swallow her mortification than permit an opportunity like this to pass. So she thanked the dealer for his kindness, saw that the pictures were hung in a good light, and left the shop.

Some one came up behind her ere she had gone a single square.

"Pardon me," said a soft, musical voice, "are you not Mrs. Forsyth?"

Turning her head she saw, with a feeling akin to terror, it was the same handsome gentleman she had noticed at the picture-dealer's.

"That is my name," she said, trying to calm herself.

"I heard you give it to Mr. Highart. I am Dudley Linton."

He looked at her earnestly as he spoke, but saw in a moment that the name was unfamiliar to her ears.

"Is it possible that Dick never spoke of me? I am his cousin."

No, Dick had never spoken of him. Elsie felt a momentary doubt of the truth of his last assertion. She had been laboring under the impression that her husband had no near relatives living.

"I did not know Dick was in New York," Dudley said, after a brief pause. "May I walk home with you just now, and pay him a visit?"

It was impossible to refuse such a request. Elsie replied to his many questions only in monosyllables, however, as they walked on. She felt relieved when the familiar house where Dick sat waiting for her at that moment came in sight.

She found him toiling patiently at "The Wanderer." Hearing her step outside the door, he stood up with a smile upon his face; but it vanished when he saw who entered just behind her. An expression blended of pain and bitterness swept over his pallid features.

"Dudley!" he said.

"Dick!"

Then he fell back in his chair and turned his face away. But Dudley was not easily rebuffed. Coming nearer, he grasped his cousin's reluctant hand.

"You and I have no quarrel, Dick," he said. "Let us be friends as of old."

"Friends?" the poor fellow repeated, in a weary voice.

"Why not? I never harbored a single evil thought toward you. I should have hunted you up long ago had I known where to find you."

A momentary struggle, then Dick turned to his visitor with his usually pleasant smile and kindly expression.

"It would be wrong to cherish resentment where none is felt toward me. I am glad to see you, Dudley."

"May I tell aunt Joanna that you are here?"

"Just as you please; it can make no difference," Dick replied, his face again clouding a little.

"Why do you live in this wretched hole?"

Wretched! It had seemed a Paradise to Dick after his previous experience. But he only said:

"The world has not used me well. I can afford no better."

"Your pictures do not find purchasers?"

"No."

"I sell one occasionally—not enough to keep me from starvation, however, were it not for the liberal allowance aunt Joanna gives me. The amount is five thousand a year."

"Five thousand dollars," Dick thought, with a bitter smile. "What sorrow, sickness and misery one-fourth of that sum would have saved me!"

And yet the woman to whom reference had been made bore the same relationship to him as to Dudley! There was no sufficient reason why she should not deal as liberally with him.

Dudley now turned to look at the picture on the easel. The subject struck him as being a little fantastic at first, but he saw in it touches of real genius. The more he gazed at it, the more it grew into his liking.

"You never did anything like this before!" he exclaimed, with enthusiasm. "It will make you famous. You are on the road to fortune at last! I could not do such work to save my life."

"I am doing it to save mine," Dick returned, very quietly. "But how did you find me out?"

Elsie now came forward and confessed what she had done—redeemed the paintings at the pawnbroker's, and taken them to a picture-dealer to be sold, where she had encountered Mr. Linton.

"I have some influence here," Dudley said, by way of supplementing the account. "Leave the matter to me, and I will see that the pictures are sold. You cannot hope to realize very much for them, but it will open a market for other work."

Shortly afterward he went away. Dick sat silent and thoughtful for some time, a shadow on his face. At length Elsie sat down beside him and said:

"Where have I seen your cousin before? I was asking myself the question all the while he was here."

"It does not seem possible you can have met him."

"I have," she persisted; "and one of these days I shall recall when and where. He had somehow left an unpleasant impression on my mind. That is what makes me so positive."

Dick made no reply. He was too busy with his own troubled thoughts just at that moment.

"Why did you never speak of Mr. Linton or your aunt Joanna?" Elsie broke the silence again by inquiring.

"I would gladly have forgotten their very existence. There are reasons why it has been extremely painful for me even to think of them—speak of them I could not."

A sigh long and deep rose to his lips. Elsie looked at him earnestly for a moment or two. What mystery was this? His aunt was evidently a very rich woman, and yet he had nearly perished of cold and starvation rather than apply to her for help.

"I wish you would tell me what you mean, Dick."

He turned away—but only for a moment. As she knelt beside him, his hand dropped lovingly upon her head.

"I will. Aunt Joanna is a strange woman, harsh, eccentric, and often unjust. I think she was fonder of me than of Dudley, however, until we both spent a night at her house some four years ago. I scarcely know how to tell

you, but—but—poison was found in the glass of lemonade that always stands beside her bed at night—she drank a little, enough to make her deathly sick—circumstances seemed to indicate it was I who had tampered with the contents of the glass, and—and—”

He covered his face with both hands and groaned aloud.

“She suspected *you!*” cried Elsie, in horror and amazement. “How could she? Oh, how could she?”

“I only know that she did,” he answered, “and that her doors have been closed against me since that dreadful night.”

“But some one must have been guilty. Who was it?”

“I do not know, or even care to conjecture.”

“If the real culprit were discovered, you would be cleared from this damaging suspicion.”

“It will all come right in God’s own time,” he answered, gravely dropping his head.

After that first visit, Dudley Linton came frequently to Dick’s lodgings. He manifested a great interest in the progress of “The Wanderer,” and was very free with his criticisms. “You have not given exactly the right expression to that face,” he said, on one occasion, and snatching the brush from Dick’s fingers made a few hasty strokes that well-nigh ruined the whole thing. Poor Dick worked two whole days before the mischief so easily done could be remedied.

Another time, the moon was too brown, and he streaked it with green patches that had to be painted out again with great trouble and labor. Again, he declared there was too much red in the sky, and caught up the brush. But this time Elsie caught his hand before he had done any mischief. She was out of all patience with his strange proceedings.

“You shall not touch a brush to that canvas again,” she exclaimed, a faint color rising in her cheeks. “There is too much at stake. One head is better than two when it comes to painting a picture.”

He desisted, of course, and made a dozen graceful apologies. But his next attempt was more desperate than anything that had preceded. Crossing the room, one day, with a bottle of ink for which Dick had asked in order to make some notes in his diary, Dudley pretended to stumble, and would have spilled the whole contents of the bottle over the picture had not Elsie, who was watching him, quickly drawn the easel aside.

For the space of ten seconds the two stood looking straight into each other’s eyes. Then Dudley drew back with a faint laugh.

“Good God!” he cried out. “What a narrow escape!”

It was indeed. There was fresh paint on the picture, and the ink-stains could not have been effectually removed.

Elsie said nothing, but she trembled with anger and excitement. In the brief space of time while they stood glaring at each other, the perplexing likeness that had so troubled and puzzled her suddenly became clear. She knew at last under what circumstances she had seen Dudley Linton before.

She said not a word of this to her husband until a long time afterward, however.

Dudley seemed restless and uneasy after this little incident, and soon withdrew. When he had gone Elsie stole up to the picture and pressed her lips to the canvas, almost ready to cry. She knew how many ambitious hopes and dreams Dick had permitted to center upon it.

“I wish that man would not come here,” she said, in a tone that made her husband stare.

“Why?”

“He is your secret enemy—a false friend—treacherous to the heart’s core!”

Dick looked startled at her earnestness. “Oh, no, I think you do Dudley an injustice in saying that,” he returned. “You have allowed yourself to be prejudiced against him by his careless ways.”

Dudley did not come again for a week; then, as he entered, he tossed a roll of crisp bank-notes into Elsie’s lap. Perhaps he hoped they might prove a peace offering.

“The pictures are sold—all three,” he said. “That is the amount they brought—seventy-five dollars. It seems a meager sum—they are well worth ten times as much. But we were compelled to let them go for what we could get.”

The money was very welcome just then, for Elsie’s scanty store had decreased alarmingly. It would save them from want a little while longer.

Dick worked early and late at “The Wanderer.” He looked like the ghost of himself as

he sat plying the brush all day long. Such incessant toil, mingled though it was with hope and enthusiasm, was wearing him out. When the picture was finished he had wasted almost to a shadow, and could scarcely hold up his head for weakness.

“The painting is too good to be wasted at a picture-dealer’s,” said Dudley, when he saw it completed. “Give it to me, and I’ll manage to have it entered at one of the galleries where the critics can see it. Nothing helps a picture so much as to be written up.”

Dick yielded—indeed he had scarcely strength enough left to object to anything—and “The Wanderer” went to an up-town gallery.

Two anxious weeks went by before anything was heard of it. At last Dudley made his appearance one afternoon bringing a folded review still damp from the press. Dick divined the truth before a single word had been uttered.

“You—you—bring bad news?” he said, trembling like a leaf as he looked up.

“Yes,” Dudley replied, dashing the review on the table before him. “The critics are fools—they don’t know a fine picture when they see one. There! read their verdict for yourself.”

Dick’s shaking hands clutched the wet sheet. Not until that moment had he realized how much the success of the picture meant to him. As he read the iron entered his soul as it never had entered man’s before. Utter and sweeping condemnation was what he found—the picture that had seemed so beautiful and perfect in his eyes was characterized as the work of an ambitious upstart.

He could not endure the blow. A clicking sound came in his throat, and with a piercing, terrible cry, he fell back insensible.

CHAPTER XV.

EVIL DAYS.

Bring me no more reports.—MACBETH.

AFTER this long digression the reader may not be unwilling to take up the thread of the story precisely where it was dropped in order to bring our new friends, the young artist and his wife, upon the stage.

For days after her husband’s awful death, Leonie Trevlyn kept aloof from everybody. Never, in all her life, had she felt so thoroughly miserable, and there was not one to whom she could go with her trouble. Gerald had already repulsed her, and Garnet was still very sick and delirious. Though thirsting for human sympathy, she felt herself hopelessly shut away from it.

Dudley Linton came every day to the house, but she shrunk in terror from meeting him. There was something very singular in her behavior as far as he was concerned. The mere sound of his voice in the hall—a voice that still had power to stir her pulses as none other could—was enough to send her flying to the door of her chamber, when every bolt would be slipped into its socket, and she would throw herself on the couch and lie there panting and trembling until he had gone away.

One morning when nearly two weeks had elapsed in this manner, she left her chamber in a desperate mood, and stole down the corridor to the room where Garnet was lying. She felt that she should go mad if shut in by herself any longer.

The child was tossing wildly on the bed, and Mrs. Webb stood by, bathing her forehead and occasionally moistening her lips. Leonie drew near with a hesitating step.

“How is Garnet this morning?” she inquired.

“No better,” came the brief reply.

“Is she still unconscious of what goes on around her?”

“Yes. When she is not raving, she lies in a sort of stupor as you see her now.”

“Poor child,” said Leonie, in a low voice.

“No one takes our trouble so hard as she does.”

For some minutes she stood beside the bed, looking sorrowfully at the withered, thin little face resting against the pillow. Oh, how altered it was! every bit of youth had gone out of it.

Suddenly Garnet threw up her hands and lifted her eyes lit with a hot light.

“Dead!” she muttered. “Good God, it cannot be! Oh, my precious papa, you shall be terribly avenged.”

Leonie changed color, and started away from the bed, saying, in a husky whisper:

“Does she often go on like that, Mrs. Webb?”

“Always, when she talks at all,” answered the woman. “It seems to be the one thought in her wandering mind—to avenge Mr. Trevlyn’s death. She has taken a queer notion that he was foully dealt with.”

Leonie felt her pulses start, but she tried to calm herself.

“How absurd!” she panted. “Can nothing be done to drive such thoughts out of the child’s head?”

“I have tried it, but she clings persistently to the idea that murder has been done. Of course it is of no use arguing with a person in her condition.”

“Murder!” repeated Leonie, as though terror-stricken. “That is a terrible word—be careful how you use it.”

“I am not the only person who has used it in this case,” said the woman, sullenly.

“What—what—do you mean?”

“Come here.” Mrs. Webb caught her by her arm, and dragged her to the window. “Do you see that man walking in the garden?”

Leonie nodded. It was Mr. Hine. He was sauntering slowly along one of the walks, smoking a cigar. She had seen him about the house and grounds, occasionally, since her husband’s death, but had not given any particular thought to the fact until now.

“Do you know why he is here?” Mrs. Webb went on. “Well, I can tell you. That man is a private detective, in the employ of Miss Gerald! She is not satisfied that her father’s death was the result of accident, and is investigating the truth.”

“No, no! Oh, no, no!”

The words fell in frightened accents from her lips. Keeping aloof from all others as she had done, no inkling of what was going on had dawned upon her mind until that moment. It came like a dreadful shock.

“No, no,” she kept repeating, and leaned against the window-frame, as though the revelation made her faint.

That day, instead of bolting herself in her chamber as usual when Dudley came to pay his customary visit to Gerald, she left the door wide open, waited and listened at it until the interview in the drawing-room was over, then flung a shawl about her, ran down the back-stairs, and met him face to face in the grounds, as he was going away.

It was the first time they had stood in each other’s presence since that night. Dudley fell back, involuntarily, and a sudden rush of blood swept up to his temples. It was quite impossible for him to meet this woman like any other.

“I have something to say to you,” she cried, before he could speak.

“Come this way, then,” he said, recovering himself almost immediately; and he would have drawn her into one of the secluded side-paths, but she broke violently from him.

“Not that way,” she panted, shuddering. “I will go in any direction but that.”

Dudley muttered an oath. In the excitement of the moment he had turned into a path that led directly to the summer-house that had witnessed so many secret interviews between them already, and had finally been the scene of a tragic death.

Not another word was spoken until they had gone some distance in the opposite direction. Then they paused at a point screened from the observation of any person at the house, by intervening shrubbery, and Dudley said:

“What have you to communicate, Mrs. Trevlyn?”

“Don’t address me by that hated name,” she cried, with another violent shudder. “It is unnecessary cruelty.”

“How could I tell that you would not resent the use of any other? Circumstances have changed since our last meeting in these grounds, please to remember.”

She looked down, but was silent.

“You have avoided me so persistently of late, Leonie, that I could not but conclude your feelings toward me had changed.”

“I wish they had,” she panted. “I wish they had.”

“Why have you sought an interview at the present time?” he said, abruptly, returning to the old question, for he felt really curious.

He saw her throat swell—a strange tremor shook her. The answer came at last, in a husky half-whisper. It took the form of a question.

“Do you know what they are saying about—about *him*—I mean Mr. Trevlyn?”

“What are they?”

“That—that—my God, how can I tell you? That he was murdered!”

Over the man’s face swept a sudden change. The color went out of it, even partially leaving the lips. He gave her one swift, searching, terrible glance, then his eyes fell.

“I had gathered that there was some doubt in regard to the manner of Robert Trevlyn’s death,” he said, trying to speak in a careless tone. “But, this is not to be bruited abroad, I

believe. It is a horrible subject—I would rather not speak of it."

"You must speak of it—this once, at least," she returned, with singular earnestness. "The matter has gone further than you may be aware. A private detective has been hanging about the premises, for days, making investigations."

"You mean that fellow, Hine?"

"I have not learned his name. I only know the simple fact to which allusion has been made."

Dudley moved uneasily.

"Nothing has been said to me by Geraldine or any one else," he returned. "But I readily divined the nature of the fellow's business here. He is much too clever and quiet for a servant."

"Oh, what will come of it?" she cried, with a low burst of hysterical sobs.

"God knows—I don't. At the worst we can—"

He broke off abruptly. Leonie heard a sharp click in his throat. After a minute's silence he pushed her away, and turned on his heel.

"If this is all you have to say, I will not stop to listen," he cried, violently. "Never broach the subject to me again. I cannot bear it."

Leonie stood like a statue, and saw him move slowly down the path where birds were twittering, and flowers tossing on either hand in the gentle breeze. Not until the shrubbery hid him from view, and she heard the gate shut, did she stir from that fixed position.

"My God!" she said, then passing her hand across her eyes.

When she returned to the house a little after, Geraldine was standing on the steps conversing in low tones with Mr. Hine. Leonie's heart beat a trifle quicker at the sight. Seizing Geraldine's arm, she drew her on violently toward the door.

"Send that man away," she said, in a hoarse whisper. "Send him away!"

Geraldine released herself, and looked her full in the face.

"This is a strange demand for you to make, Mrs. Trevlyn. I see no occasion for it."

"Send him away," Leonie kept repeating, with passionate vehemence. "For God's sake, send him away!"

"Why should I? He is of use to me. What fault have you to find with him?"

"Send him away!" she cried again, with gasps between her words. "You must—or bring ruin—and shame—upon those you love. For God's sake, for your own sake, for all our sakes, let this investigation drop!"

With these wild, incomprehensible words, she suddenly rushed past Geraldine and shut herself into the house.

As soon as she disappeared, Mr. Hine came slowly up the steps. He had witnessed the strange scene, his acute ears had even gathered every word that had been uttered, and now what he thought of it was plainly expressed in his face.

"Miss Trevlyn," he said, abruptly, "you brought me here to inquire into the mystery that envelops your father's sudden death. Of course it is your wish that I should speak upon the subject with the utmost freedom?"

She hesitated, grew perceptibly paler, but finally said:

"It is."

"But I might be compelled to broach theories that would shock and distress you."

"I am prepared for that. If you have anything to disclose, pray do so without further preface."

He shook his head.

"No new facts bearing upon the case have come to light. But I have formed a new theory. I might have told you so before, but hesitated to speak of it. I think I had better be perfectly frank with you, however."

"I hope you will."

"Your sister endeavored, in the first place, to throw suspicion upon Mr. Ray Armitage. Several facts have come to my knowledge that would be strong circumstantial evidence against that gentleman. Though pretending to ridicule the idea, there was a time when I felt strongly tempted to believe in his guilt myself."

She drew back a step, shaking as in an ague fit.

"And now you think otherwise?" she cried.

"Now you think otherwise?"

"Yes."

"Tell me your present theory, Mr. Hine. Oh, you don't know how I have suffered from this uncertainty—am suffering still! If you can put an end to it, pray do so at whatever cost."

"No, Miss Trevlyn, I can only give you a new

hypothesis for an old one. Do you not realize that there must have been a cause for the singular behavior of the woman who has just left you? It is my present belief that Mrs. Trevlyn could reveal the whole mystery if so disposed!"

Geraldine started. The idea was not new to her thoughts, but she had never before heard it expressed in words. No one knew better than herself that Leonie had married her father for his wealth and position, though her heart was given to Dudley Linton, between whom and herself had existed a secret understanding all along.

"You would not insinuate that she murdered papa?" Geraldine cried, panting. "Not that—not that!"

"She may not have killed him herself," the detective gravely replied; "but I am satisfied she knows who did—perhaps even instigated the deed!"

Geraldine put her hand over her heart as though trying to still its passionate throbbings.

"This is too dreadful! For God's sake say no more until you have something besides conjecture to offer."

CHAPTER XVI.

A CRISIS.

—Ah, me, how weak a thing
The heart of woman is.—SHAKESPEARE.

THREE days later, Leonie was sitting beside the couch in Garnet's chamber, one afternoon, when the child, who had been sleeping soundly for some time, suddenly opened her eyes and looked at her with a gleam of intelligence.

"Is it you, Leonie? What are you doing here?"

Leonie started up, and bent over the couch. A great change had come over that pallid little face; it was no longer distorted with pain, or wrung with the fury of delirium.

"You have been ill, Garnet," she said, as calmly as she could. "I came to sit with you while Mrs. Webb attends to some duties downstairs."

They were both silent for a minute, then Garnet suddenly pushed back the thick, entangled locks from her wasted face, and said:

"I know I have been out of my head, Leonie. I still feel weak and bewildered, and can only collect my thoughts by making a great exertion. What have I said? Tell me! A great many nonsensical things, there is no doubt."

Her twinkling red eyes were lifted so steadily and inquiringly, that Leonie's fell before them.

"I heard little, indeed, of your ravings," she replied. "The housekeeper was with you almost constantly."

"Has she not told you what I talked about in my delirium?"

"I do not think Mrs. Webb gathered anything in particular from your talk, it was so incoherent and rambling. But it can be of no consequence, one way or the other."

Garnet had slightly raised herself from the pillow, but she now fell back again, breathing a long, relieved sigh. A heavy load had evidently been lifted from her mind.

"Don't leave me yet," she said, at length, when Leonie turned to go away. "I hate to be alone. I'm haunted, Leonie, I see terrible things when no one is by to keep them aloof! Oh, it is dreadful to be so tormented! I wish I dared tell you what I suffer—but I must not!"

"If there is anything on your mind it might be a great relief to disclose it."

"Anything on my mind!" echoed the child, with a shrill, scornful laugh. "For God's sake, Leonie, where are your wits? Who said I had anything on my mind? Not I!"

"No," said Leonie, soothingly, "you did not. There, there, I had no idea of vexing you, dear. Do try to keep yourself quiet for a little."

Garnet tossed about restlessly for a minute or two, then fixed her terrible eyes on Leonie's face once more.

"What has been done with Ray Armitage?" she abruptly demanded.

"What has been done with him? I don't know what you mean."

"Where is he? Has he been arrested and dragged to prison? Tell me, quickly—I am dying to know."

Leonie stared at her in a bewildered way.

"I fear you are delirious again, poor child," she said. "Try to calm yourself. What has Mr. Armitage done, that his liberty should be restricted?"

"Don't you know? Has not Geraldine told you?"

"Nothing."

"Good God!" she cried, striking her palms fiercely together. "Has that villain been allowed to go free? Was it for naught that I de-

nounced him? Oh, this is insufferable! Wretch, hypocrite, murderer! God above, how I hate him!"

Leonie's heart almost ceased beating. "Take care," she cried, hastily, in a frightened voice. "Murderer is a dreadful name to apply to any one."

"Ray Armitage deserves it. Did he not kill poor papa?"

"He?" Leonie cried, panting, and striking her hands on her breast. "What madness is this? Ray Armitage my husband's murderer? No, oh, God, no!"

"I saw him do it!"

It was all Garnet said, but her face was ghastly. A succession of shudders suddenly convulsed her frame, and clutching the clothes she gathered them tightly over her eyes.

For some time Leonie stood as if stupefied. She asked no further questions, nor did Garnet speak again. Each seemed to shrink from meeting the other's eyes, all at once, as though some spell of horror and mutual repulsion had suddenly fallen between them.

When Mrs. Webb entered the room, presently, Leonie started, like a person waking out of a dream, and made a gesture in the direction of the bed. "She is conscious—go to her," she faintly uttered, then went away, with slow and heavy steps.

It may have been an hour later that she heard in the lower hall the rich, musical tones of a voice that thrilled her very soul. Obeying her strong first impulse, she rose and went swiftly down-stairs. Dudley Linton was at that moment entering the drawing-room alone. She followed him in and shut the door.

I don't know what he saw in her face, but Dudley's changed perceptibly as he looked at her. He grew very pale, and fell back a step.

"You shrink from me," she said, trembling a little, but looking at him steadily. "Why is it?"

"You startled me so. I—I—thought it was Geraldine."

She went nearer to him; her eyes were dilated with a strange fire; her breath came hurriedly and painfully.

"Oh, how I have suffered!" she gasped. "I can bear it no longer—not a day—not an hour!"

"Why, Leonie, what is the matter?"

"What!" she cried, furiously. "Do you think I am ice—my heart of flint—my nerves of iron? You know very well what is the matter. Dudley Linton. My love for you is killing me—my love, and the anguish and torture I suffer because of it."

"Hush!" he said, hoarsely. "You might be overheard."

"I don't care! I've struggled long enough, and now I'm done with it."

"Struggled against what?"

"The temptation to fling myself at your feet, and defy the whole world! Oh, there has been a constant warfare in my soul all these terrible nights and days. Now I mean to settle it. Why should I be troubled by what others may think or say? You are my life and light."

She was grand in her passionate vehemence. Though Dudley's pulses thrilled, he seemed more frightened than pleased by it.

"Try to calm these transports," he urged.

"I don't care," she repeated. "I felt it my duty, at first, to shun and treat you coldly; but all that is past. A great sin and sorrow has come between us, but I don't even care for that. You may be a bad, false, cruel man—sometimes I feel that you are—but even your wickedness is powerless to turn me against you."

She paused, and looking straight into his eyes saw him redden and pale alternately, his face full of alarm and uneasiness.

"Hush!" he breathed. "I hear some one coming."

"It does not matter. I'm ready to defy them all. We have no longer a secret to keep. Let any one find it out who will."

She was utterly reckless. As the door swung open she leaned forward suddenly and dropped her face upon his shoulder. That pitch had been reached in which all fear of consequences is flung to the winds.

An angry expression darkened his face. He would have released himself, but there was no time. Even as he raised his hand to push her away Geraldine stood within the room looking at him with an incredulous stare in which was a mixture of contempt. A minute's dead silence, then the new-comer spoke:

"I would not have intruded, believe me, had I known how little I was wanted here," she said coldly and haughtily.

She turned, but before she could go away Dudley had thrust Leonie from him with no

gentle hand, and made an excited movement forward.

"Stop!" he cried out. "I have something to say before you go."

She flashed upon him a scornful look.

"Well?" she said.

Leonie had thrown herself into an arm-chair, where she sat pallid and trembling.

"I cannot suffer you to depart without a word of self-exculpation," Dudley said. "Gerald, I am not so faithless to you as appearances would indicate. I hope you will believe me when I assure you that I am not in any way answerable for the situation in which you found me."

Leonie started, and passed her hand over her eyes. Gerald only threw her head back.

"It is of no consequence, Mr. Linton," she said. "I have suspected for some time that you wished to be released from your engagement to me. Be it so—you are free."

"Oh, Dudley—" Leonie began, but he stopped her with an angry gesture.

"I have not asked for my freedom, Gerald," he exclaimed. "Neither do I wish it. You cruelly misjudge me if you think so. I entered this room expecting and desiring to meet you alone."

She drew herself still more haughtily erect.

"Perhaps you will say next it is me you love, and not—her!" with a scornful gesture in Leonie's direction.

"Certainly. I do say so, and it is the truth."

A bitter, heart-broken cry came from the arm-chair. He had spoken sincerely, however. To a man of Dudley Linton's stamp, only the unattainable is desirable. While Robert Trevlyn lived, and Leonie seemed lost to him forever, the old passion for her had been fanned into sudden flame again. He had even persuaded himself that she alone could make him happy.

Now that she was free, and more than willing to accept his homage, a revulsion in his feelings had gradually come about. Her love no longer seemed a necessity. It was Gerald who now filled all his heart. He blamed himself severely for having suffered his fickle fancy to wander away from her for a moment. Inclination and ambition were alike impelling him to be true to her and disavow every other passion.

Indeed it may be said that Robert Trevlyn's death, removing as it did every obstacle between him and Leonie, was the natural signal for his affections to concentrate themselves upon his betrothed to the utter discomfiture of the woman who had suffered so terribly through his instrumentality.

Coming still closer to Gerald he continued in the soft, persuasive tones he knew so well how to employ:

"If I preferred any other woman to you, this would be the time to acknowledge it. You have given me every opportunity. I do not. I have had other fancies—no man marries his first love. But my best love is given to you alone. Gerald, do not cast me off so lightly."

The repressed earnestness of his manner had its effect. Gerald's head drooped a little—her haughty manner softened.

"I don't know what I ought to do," she said, wearily. "I have been vexed and hurt. You must give me time—to think the matter over."

Her voice broke a little at the last. With a quick, shuddering glance at the shrinking figure in the chair she went out and closed the door.

CHAPTER XVII.

LEONIE'S DESPAIR.

You canker-blossom!

You thief of love! what, have you come by night,
And stolen my love's heart from him?

—SHAKESPEARE.

LEFT alone with her faithless lover, it was Leonie who first gathered sufficient self-control to speak. Stretching out her hands in a gesture of abject terror and appeal, she cried, panting:

"Dudley, oh, for God's sake tell me you didn't mean what you said! It can't be. I will believe anything but that you have forgotten your old loving devotion to me. That would be too dreadful. For God's sake tell me you didn't mean it."

"But I did," he answered, with brutal bitterness. "I meant every word of it."

She stared at him as if fascinated.

"No, no, no! I won't believe it. You've gone too far to throw me off now. Only a few days have gone by since your love was at fever-heat. Think of all your vows and protestations at our secret meetings in the summer-house! Even yet they are ringing in my ears and driving me half-distracted."

The words produced some effect, for he turned his eyes away as though he could not bear to look at her.

"You have not changed so soon—it isn't possible," she exclaimed. "You are only trying me. Oh, Dudley, Dudley, it is cruel of you to wring my heart like this! After all I have endured and suffered for you—after all that has passed—you would not dare thrust me aside for another the moment my freedom is won!"

"Don't think to frighten me," he said, sullenly, "or I might defy you to do your worst. In a contest of that sort you could scarcely hope to come off victorious."

With a wild, pitiful cry she flung herself at his feet, clasping his knees with her clinging arms.

"I don't mean to threaten—only to implore," she gasped. "Oh, Dudley, don't turn away from me. Don't do it. Kill me if you will—it would be the kindest thing you could do—but let me die feeling that you love me still, and will love none other in this world or the next."

He tore himself away from her clinging arms with a muttered oath.

"Don't be theatrical, Leonie. This ridiculous scene has gone far enough. What can you expect under the circumstances? Gerald Trevlyn is my betrothed wife, and I have no choice but to marry her."

"She offers to release you. One word from your lips, and all is at an end between you."

"But I am not such an idiot as to speak that word."

She started, and rose slowly to her feet, looking at him in a stunned fashion, as though bewildered. Suddenly she struck both hands together and uttered an agonizing cry.

"Great God! You do mean to give me up! You do mean it!"

"Yes; nothing else can be done."

"After such sin and suffering, after such crime and horror, this—this is to be the end!" she went on, without heeding him. "It is too much—" and she sunk again on the floor, covering her face in her hands.

He turned from her coldly and relentlessly.

"You compel me to be very plain with you, Leonie. Even though Gerald should break faith with me, it would be out of the question for me to make you my wife. I have had time to think the matter over coolly and dispassionately since Mr. Trevlyn's death. My first impulse was to claim you for my own; but now I realize how foolish such a course would have been. My reputation, my whole future career, perhaps, hangs in the balance. Unpleasant truths concerning your past life might come to light at any moment. It would be a fearful risk to run, and you cannot reasonably expect me to do anything of the sort. Even for your sake I cannot give up social position, and the ambitious dreams I have always cherished."

It was to her the cruel words had been spoken—to her! Ah, how they burned their way into her benumbed brain! She did not speak—there was such a choking sensation in her throat that utterance was denied her. But she slowly raised her head and looked him a long, solemn gaze, then signed for him to leave her.

He went at once—the gesture compelled obedience, and he was glad to go.

For a long time after he had left her, Leonie sat motionless, her slack hands fallen by her side. The birds sung and twittered outside the open window, and the scented breeze, after rustling the lace curtains, stole on to kiss her hot forehead. But deaf and blind to earthly sounds and sights, she sat like one palsied, not a sigh or a groan coming to relieve the anguish of her stricken heart.

At last, when it seemed as though hours had elapsed, she arose, stiff and bewildered. "Oh, my God," she ejaculated, in a hoarse whisper, "is this to be the end? This?" And an agonizing cry broke from her pallid lips.

About ten o'clock that night Gerald heard some one moving in the study down-stairs. The room had been shut up since her father's death, and a feeling of vague uneasiness caused her to hurry down to see who had ventured to enter therein.

Leonie stood just in front of the Japanese cabinet, and had one of the tiny drawers drawn out. She was looking like one fascinated at some object that lay within. Gerald shrunk back when she saw her, unable to resist the feeling of repulsion and loathing that came over her. While turning, however, she caught a clearer view of Leonie's face, and something in its expression arrested her steps. While she hesitated, Leonie suddenly snatched a glittering object from the drawer. It was a silver-mounted revolver, the fellow to that with which Robert Trevlyn had been slain!

There could be no doubt of her purpose. Gerald read it in her trembling frame, her ghastly face, and the wild, fierce light that flashed from her burning eyes.

"Leonie, what would you do?" she exclaimed, springing forward. "Oh, this is madness!"

The desperate creature looked round with such a cry as a wild beast might have uttered. There was a momentary struggle, but Gerald was the stronger of the two, and had soon wrenched the deadly weapon away, and thrust it behind her back.

"You shall not murder yourself," she cried. "We have had horror enough already."

"Give the revolver to me," said Leonie, panting. "Give it to me."

"I will not."

"Oh, be merciful, and let me have it."

"I can only be merciful by withholding it. You intend to destroy yourself."

"Yes," she said, tremulously. "I am weary of life. There is nothing left to make it endurable. I want rest—eternal rest. Oh, why did you come between me and my purpose?"

Sinking down on a chair she gave way to a burst of fierce, uncontrollable sobs—if sobs they could be called, for her eyes were still dry and burning. Gerald could not help being touched by a momentary feeling of pity. If this woman had sinned, she was atoning for it by the intensity of her suffering.

"Come away," she said, in a gentle voice.

"I don't like to leave you here. Come to my room."

Leonie raised her head, and looked at her steadily a moment.

"You are a good woman, Miss Trevlyn," she said. "You can be kind, even to me. You do not know, perhaps, how much better it would be for you if I were dead, and out of your way."

"Don't speak of such things," said Gerald, shuddering.

"I must. I have been a curse to this house from first to last. But God knows I never meant to be. I want you to believe that—I never meant to be. But circumstances were too strong for me to control. The least thing I can do now is to place myself beyond the possibility of troubling you more."

"Hush! You are nervous and exhausted. If you will not come with me, at least lie down and try to calm yourself."

She sat for a moment or so with her hands clasped before her eyes. Then, as Gerald made a movement to leave the room, she arose and followed her. On reaching the upper landing she paused suddenly, and caught Gerald's arm.

"Have you made up your mind?" she said in a whisper. "He loves you—you, and not me, as I was once weak enough to believe. Will you marry him?"

Gerald shook off her hand almost roughly.

"I must decline to discuss this question with you," she answered, the old chill of repulsion in her voice.

"You are right," said Leonie, slowly; "it is not my privilege to inquire. But, for your own sake, I hope you will weigh the matter well before binding yourself to a man like Dudley Linton. A warning from my lips seems singularly out of place; but there are reasons—"

She broke off abruptly, with one of her convulsive shudders.

"Go on," said Gerald, fixing her eyes steadily on the white, desperate face of the unhappy woman. "Is there not something you wish, yet hesitate, to tell me?"

"No, no," cried Leonie, with a wild, almost repellent gesture. "There is nothing. Ask me no more—I have said too much already."

And striking her clenched hand upon her breast, she staggered to the door of her own chamber, went in, and closed it behind her.

An hour or two later the child, Garnet, awakened from a dream-haunted sleep to find Leonie standing over her like an apparition. Her eyes were set, her face looked ghastly as that of a dead woman.

Mrs. Webb, overcome with weariness, was snoring loudly in the capacious depths of an arm-chair at the foot of the bed. The child and her midnight visitor were the same as alone.

Leonie stood with her hands pressed together, and spoke to the child in a harsh, hollow voice.

"Garnet," she said, "are you awake? and do you know me?"

"Yes, I know you," was the answer.

"I came to say good-by. You are the only friend I have in this house, Garnet. God bless you. There is no one else in all the world who cares whether I live or die. Oh, it is dreadful—to be so forsaken!"

The wildness of her words and manner arrested Garnet's attention at once. "What do you mean?" she inquired. "You are looking

very ill and unhappy. Why do you say good-by when it is only good-night that you mean?"

"Yes, it is good-night," said Leonie, in a whisper. "Kiss me, Garnet. Will you?"

The child made a forward movement, and their lips clung convulsively a moment. Then Leonie slowly raised herself and went out.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GONE!

Gloom is upon thy lonely hearth,
Oh, silent house! once filled with mirth.

—HEMANS.

GARNET'S slumbers during the remainder of that night were broken and uneasy. Leonie's ghastly face kept rising before her mental vision, and she felt that something more than usual was amiss. But what could it be?

She tossed restlessly until long after day-break, then awakened Mrs. Webb, who was still slumbering in her chair.

"I want Leonie," she said. "Go and tell her to come."

"It is very early," grumbled the housekeeper, rubbing her eyes. "Mrs. Trevlyn will not be up at this hour."

"Go!" screamed the child, throwing out her clenched hand. "How dare you stop to reason with me? I will see Leonie. I have something to say to her. Unless you go for her at once I shall get out of bed and seek her myself."

"Willful child!" muttered Mrs. Webb. "There, try to keep yourself quiet. I'll have to go, of course."

Garnet fell back panting, as though exhausted by the passion into which she had worked herself. "I'll find out what it is that troubles Leonie," she thought. "Then she shall be told about Ray Armitage. She was poor papa's wife—she won't permit that wretch to go unpunished as Gerald has done!"

In about five minutes the housekeeper returned, looking scared and distressed.

"Mrs. Trevlyn is not to be found!" she exclaimed. "I have looked everywhere. She is not in the house."

Garnet stared at her with a bewildered expression.

"Not in the house?" she repeated.

"No. Finding the door of her chamber ajar I entered. No one was there—the bed had not been slept in. My poor lady has gone away."

"Gone?" Garnet repeated, slow to comprehend the truth. "What are you talking about? Where should Leonie go—and in the night-time?"

"God be merciful to us all! I fear she has destroyed herself!"

Their eyes met, for the space of ten seconds they glared at each other in horror. Mrs. Webb did not know what had transpired the day before, but she had noticed an unusual wildness in Leonie's manner, and now the remembrance of it filled her mind with vague terror. She had known before this that the poor soul was capable of desperate things if driven to extremity.

As for the child, she recalled that midnight visit, and Leonie's strange words. They had had a greater significance than she was aware.

"Some one has ill-treated her," she cried, starting up in bed. "She would not have gone away unless driven by persecution. She was the only person I loved, now that papa is dead. They've driven her away, but I'll have her back again! I'll have her back if she is alive and can be found."

"I loved her, too, after my own fashion," said the housekeeper, grimly. "You are right—this matter must be investigated."

Directly, the room was half-filled with persons brought together by Garnet's wild shrieks and ravings. Gerald entered looking pale and agitated. The tidings that Leonie had disappeared in the night filled her with dismay and consternation.

"It is you who have done this!" Garnet cried, catching sight of her sister. "You always hated Leonie because she married papa. And now you have contrived in some way—I know not how—to drive her to self-destruction!"

"Hush, oh, hush!"

"You have!" screamed the child. "Once before you undertook to drive her from the house. You thought she had no friend who would stand by her. It was a mistake. She shall come back—I say it. And I'll beat out my own brains unless you send for her at once. I can't bear this trouble, and I won't."

"Calm yourself," pleaded Gerald. "I give you my word that everything that can be shall be done to find Mrs. Trevlyn and bring her back."

"Let it be done quickly," gasped the little demon, "or I shall think you intend to put me off as was done once before when I told Mr. Hine that Ray Armitage murdered my father. No more attention was given to the charge than as though the wind had whispered it! But I will not be so dealt with again—no, never!"

"Hush! You shall be quiet!" cried Gerald, turning very pale. "It is cruel and wicked to give utterance to such ravings."

Garnet's tongue could not be stopped so easily, however. It wagged so fast, and uttered such terrible things, that Gerald had no choice but to hurry the servants from the chamber and shut the door. They had heard quite sufficient to set suspicion and conjecture at work, however. It was impossible to tell where the evil results of those rash words would end.

Garnet grew calmer at length, and was lying pale and still upon the couch, as though exhausted, when the door bell rung and voices became audible in the lower hall. Dudley Linton and Ray Armitage had arrived at the same moment, both unexpectedly.

The sick child lifted her head eagerly at the sounds, and finally spoke to Mrs. Webb. There was a hard, cruel look in her eyes, not often to be seen there.

"I know who has come—I recognize their voices," she said. "Go, bring them here. It is well they came together."

"But—"

"Go!" It was all she said, but the housekeeper thought it best to obey. Gerald had left the chamber a short time before, and there was no one to whom she could appeal.

The two gentlemen came up at once. Gerald heard their footsteps ascending the stairs and followed them in. She felt like one who sees an abyss yawning before her, but it was too late to draw back; she could only await the result.

Garnet gave Ray Armitage one look of hatred and vindictiveness, then turned to Dudley Linton, and beckoned the latter to approach.

"Do you know what has been done?" she cried, in a husky whisper. "They have driven Leonie away by their harshness and cruelty. She may be dead ere this."

"Dead! Leonie? What do you mean?" he gasped, starting back a step, and turning very pale.

"She is gone. She went last night, after coming to bid me farewell. We fear she has taken her own life."

"No, no! Good God, no!"

The tone was almost one of self-conviction. He fell into a chair, and hid his face in his hands. If Leonie had committed suicide in her despair, he was not guiltless of her death.

The strong necessity for self-control helped him speedily to rally, however. Gerald and Mrs. Webb alone knew that his interest in the unfortunate woman had been more than a purely friendly one, and even they, he believed, divined only a portion of the truth. It was well to keep it hidden as long as possible.

"Is this true?" he said, in a hollow voice, turning to Gerald. "Is Mrs. Trevlyn really gone?"

"Yes," she coldly replied.

"But, you do not believe she has tampered with her own life? Oh, no, that is not possible!"

Rising, he came nearer, and would have laid his hand upon her arm, but she drew back with a shrinking gesture.

"She is gone—we can only conjecture what has become of her. From what I have witnessed myself, I fear the worst, however."

She did not go on to explain; the scene in the study, the night before, was not one upon which she cared to dwell. Dropping her voice, she added, for Dudley's ear, alone:

"This unfortunate circumstance decides the question we left unsettled yesterday. All is at an end between us."

He looked at her in a stunned fashion.

"You do not mean it?" he cried. "You would not be so cruel? It is very ungenerous to punish me for the insane act of which Leonie has been guilty. Could I help it that you had gained such an ascendancy over my heart that that unhappy woman was unable to touch it? It is not my fault that she loved me."

"We will not discuss the subject," she said, turning away, almost haughtily.

At that instant a shrill cry from Garnet drew their attention to the couch. The child, gathering all her strength and venom for the effort, had suddenly raised her head and fixed on Ray Armitage her terrible, burning eyes.

"Now let me tell why I sent for you," she screamed. "It was to denounce you in the

presence of these witnesses. I should have done so before but for my illness. Troubles have been piling thick and fast upon this doomed house, and now we have our fill of them. You are responsible for every calamity that has occurred! You, liar, poltroon, villain, that you are! What part you played in driving Leonie away I do not know, but it must have been an important one. Oh, if I could strike you dead as you stand, I would instantly do it!"

Ray only looked bewildered by this outbreak of rage and misery.

"Poor child," he said. "Do not excite yourself. You are laboring under some mistake, or you would not give utterance to such expressions."

He drew nearer, and dropped his hand on her arm in a soothing gesture, but she angrily struck it off.

"Murderer!" she hissed. "I shall go mad if you touch me!"

"Murderer?"

He echoed the word in a questioning way; then, while he stood, mute, staring at her like a man stupefied, a sudden tremor shook every limb, and turned his face white as that of a dead person's. "Oh, God!" was all he said.

Garnet was watching him with cruel intentness. "Your face betrays you," she cried. "You can't disguise the terror that word inspires. Let me speak it again—murderer! It was you who killed my poor papa!"

Ray staggered and drew back as from a deadly blow. Whether the accusation was true or false, it came with stunning force. He clung to the wall like one who sees a frightful abyss yawning at his feet. All his strength, courage and manliness seemed to ebb suddenly away.

"For God's sake, don't say that!" he faintly gasped. "You know it isn't true. A murderer! Oh, just Heaven!"

"It is true," cried Garnet, gloating over his anguish like a little demon, "and I shall live to see you punished for the crime. That is all I ask—to be the one to bring you to justice. My testimony alone is sufficient to convict you. I saw you do the deed!"

A suppressed murmur ran through the room. Dudley started to his feet involuntarily, opened his lips to speak, then fell back again. Even at a moment like that the man's selfish nature came strongly to the surface. He had always regarded Ray Armitage as in some sense a rival—an unsuccessful one, it is true—but there was a lurking feeling of bitterness in his heart. This accusation, whether persisted in or not, might have the effect of removing a possible obstacle from his path.

"Let the farce go on; why should I seek to end it?" he thought, bitterly. "It may do me good service, after all."

Ray seemed utterly overwhelmed at first. It was not until Garnet had begun to utter further abuse, now mingled with invective, that he aroused from the stupor that had fallen upon his senses.

"This is a terrible accusation, and must be investigated. Nothing else would satisfy me now."

"Yes, the matter shall be thoroughly sifted," said Garnet, in mocking accents. "You can safely leave that portion of the work to me. It will soon be accomplished—if the Lord spares my life and reason. Mr. Linton, do you bring a magistrate at once, or some one who has power to act in a case like this."

Dudley hesitated, and looked at Gerald. She made an impulsive forward movement.

"No, no," she panted, "this must not be."

"I wish it as much as Garnet does," said Ray, quietly, though the livid pallor had crept over his face again. "It is my privilege to clear myself of the monstrous charge. I cannot remain inactive even under the taint of suspicion."

The man was sent for and came. Mr. Hine, the detective, was with him, and both looked very grave. They had been talking quite freely on the way, and Dudley, who was with them, had taken care to throw out ample hints for their consideration.

A sort of examination was held in Garnet's chamber. The child told her story clearly enough. After parting from her sister that night in the grounds, she had made her way toward the summer-house, where she beheld the figure of her father standing motionless on the steps. Before she could approach, or even cry out, a man disguised in a long cloak and slouched hat had stolen up from the other side of the building, presented a pistol, and shot her father in cold blood.

"The moonlight shone full upon the assassin's face for a moment," she said in conclusion. "It

was Ray Armitage's—I saw it too distinctly to be mistaken."

Mr. Hine was next called upon to tell all he knew of the case. He briefly explained his reasons for thinking Robert Trevlyn had perished by another hand than his own; then went on to speak of the discovery of the cloak and hat, and the discharged revolver.

Garnet's eyes glowed with almost fiendish pleasure when mention was made of the disguise that had been found in the shrubbery. "That Ray Armitage was in the grounds, that night, and wore such a hat and cloak, can be easily proven," she cried, glaring at him vindictively. "Gerald met the wretch there, and spoke to him. I saw them, though they knew it not. They cannot deny it."

Ray passed his hand wearily across his forehead.

"Yes, I was there," he said, "but the disguise found by Mr. Hine was none of mine. I hope you will believe me. I would have died sooner than injure Robert Trevlyn, hard and unjust as he had been to me."

The officer of the law looked more solemn than ever.

"The evidence against you, Mr. Armitage, is of such a nature that I cannot lose sight of you until you are committed for trial," he said.

"Must it come to that?"

"There is now no help for it, sir."

"Ah!" He shuddered, and drew back involuntarily, but in a moment the weakness had been conquered.

"Take me away, I am ready to go," he said, with an effort. "Garnet," he added, turning to the couch, "you are but a child, and may not realize how your malice and hatred have blighted my whole future. Therefore I forgive you."

She dropped her head—she dared not trust herself to look at him as the men led him away.

CHAPTER XIX.

TREACHERY.

And some that smile have in their hearts, I fear,
Millions of mischief. —SHAKESPEARE.

THE adverse criticism that damned his picture had well-nigh stricken out Richard Forsyth's life as well. He had toiled at it early and late, working beyond his strength in a frenzy of hope and enthusiasm. When all was over, when the bitter, cruel words of condemnation had met his eye and burned their way into his brain, and he felt that his beautiful work was lost—worse than wasted—a reaction came. Strength, courage, and ambition forsook him together. He felt that his sentence had been passed, and nothing could ever modify it.

Had not Elsie been with him, cheering him by her presence, and the hopeful smiles that hid her own breaking heart, the troubles of this world would soon have been over. As it was, he grew paler and weaker every day, like one traveling steadily toward the valley of shadows, but who lingers reluctantly on the way, as though this life still had ties too precious to be broken. And so it had—even the terrible pain and disappointment that were eating his heart-strings away could not reconcile him to the thought of parting with his wife, even for a season.

"I want to live—I must live—for Elsie's sake," he said, over and over again, to himself. "My life has not been so happy that I need cling to it, but it seems cruel to leave my darling to suffer alone. She will be quite heart-broken."

Some people may declare it impossible that one could be so utterly crushed by a few words of adverse criticism. But Richard Forsyth's is not the only sensitive spirit that has been blighted and destroyed by the cruel condemnation of the world's self-constituted critics. Such cases are more common than some may imagine.

The measure of misfortune was not yet full. At length Elsie's little store of money gave out, and none was coming in to take its place. Richard required nourishing food, and many little comforts, and not a dollar was left with which to purchase them.

Let me hasten over that wretched time, for it represents a period some weeks previous to the events that have been narrated in the last few chapters, and has only been referred to that the events which followed might be thoroughly understood.

At length Elsie decided to ask help of Dudley Linton. It cost her an effort to arrive at the decision, for she had disliked and distrusted

him more than ever since the last episode relating to the completed picture. But, for Dick's sake, she would have done anything. It would not be necessary to ask him for money outright—there was another way in which he might be able to assist them.

He seldom came to their lodgings now—the place seemed to fill him with a secret horror, that could not be altogether disguised. He would keep aloof for weeks at a time, and then appear unexpectedly, sit and chat nervously for a few moments, then depart to be seen no more, perhaps, for a month or two.

During one of these flying visits, Elsie took occasion to see Dudley alone.

"I have a favor to ask, Mr. Linton," she said, her sweet voice trembling a little. "It is true, is it not, that you still have considerable influence with picture-dealers and buyers?"

He guessed what was coming, and his face hardened a little.

"My influence is nothing to speak of, Mrs. Forsyth."

"I wish it was sufficient to find a purchaser for Dick's picture of 'The Wanderer.' Don't you think it is?"

He shook his head, looking more than half irritated.

"I might give it away, but that is not what you want."

"No, it ought to bring quite a sum of money."

"It never will—you should not expect it," Dudley said, quite sharply. "When the art critics have condemned a picture, there is no hope for it. In this country purchasers are usually guided by what they read and hear, in such matters."

Elsie felt a flush rise slowly to her face.

"'The Wanderer' has merit," she said, hastily. "You know that as well as I do. Poorer pictures than that often sell for fabulous sums."

"That may be true. But the public is whimsical. To please and benefit you, I would gladly find a purchaser for Dick's work, but I fear it is impossible."

"Ah!" The involuntary ejaculation expressed so much that he turned and looked at her.

"I'm afraid you are in want of money," he said, after a pause. "Here is my purse—you will be doing me a real favor by accepting it."

"No," shrinking from him, while the color deepened in her face, "you must forgive me—I cannot take your money. Put it up, and say no more."

Something in her voice and manner compelled obedience, and after moving restlessly about the poor little room for a short while, and talking to Dick in an absent-minded way, he departed.

It was an hour later that Elsie, while trying to make the neat room look even more tidy and cheerful, came suddenly upon a small roll of bank-notes lying beside her sewing on the window-sill. Twenty dollars! It seemed like a small fortune in this emergency.

All at once she remembered who must have left them there, and the notes fluttered from her fingers. She even stepped on them as they lay at her feet. She could not accept charity from him—never!

Her face flushed again, and her heart began to beat with angry excitement. Just then she happened to glance at her husband. He was breathing heavily, and lay with his eyes shut. Oh, how altered he was, so pallid and stricken-looking! His lips seemed parched, and though nothing had been said, she knew he had been longing all day for some cooling drink.

All pride was stricken out of her in an instant. She picked up the money and took down her shawl.

"Dick shall have what he needs—I will not stand between him and a single comfort," she muttered. "Pride is a pitiful thing to cherish in a time like this."

Three miserable weeks wore on, and she was again penniless. This time she determined to see what had been done with Dick's picture—perhaps dispose of it herself. So, dressing herself with unusual care, she made her way to the gallery where it had been hung.

At first she thought it must have been removed from the gallery altogether. She looked up and down the long room, but it was not on either side, and she had searched for some time before she found it. It had been hung in a dark corner behind a door where not one visitor in a hundred would ever discover it!

For a few moments she felt sick and faint. What did it mean? Why had the picture been thrust aside in that out-of-the-way corner? A

miserable suspicion that refused to be banished was growing into conviction in her mind.

Stepping up to one of the attendants she addressed him in a tone of forced composure:

"Do you not think that picture yonder deserves a better position?"

"Certainly," he replied, glancing in the direction indicated. "Between you and me it is one of the very best in the gallery. But the artist is not known, and outside influence has been brought to bear against him."

"What do you mean by outside influence?"

"Oh," with a dry laugh, "artists, like other men, have their petty jealousies. That picture might have made quite a stir had not one of their own number deliberately laid himself out to kill it. Such things are not uncommon."

"But how did he do it?" Elsie asked, in a tone that made the attendant stare.

"Easily enough. In the first place he managed to have it removed from the place where it was originally hung and placed where you find it, behind the door. Then he wrote an article for one of the reviews in which both the artist and his work were criticised unmercifully."

Elsie felt her pulses start; but she managed to control herself.

"Will you tell me the name of the person to whom you refer?" she said, hastily.

"Excuse me," shaking his head, "I don't feel free to disclose that. It is not quite the thing to gossip about the matter at all, but indignation at such injustice sometimes gets the better of me. The strangest part of the whole affair is the fact that the very person who had the picture admitted was the one who wrote the scathing criticism that condemned it. I don't understand it."

But Elsie did. Dudley Linton's anxiety to take charge of Dick's work was perfectly comprehensible at last. He had deliberately made up his mind from the beginning to blight all the beautiful hopes that had centered about that picture! Knowing that it had merit he had resorted to a trick to prevent its good points from being recognized and rewarded!

"It is not necessary to say more," she exclaimed, after a moment's silence. "I know the history of that painting even better than you do. It was Dudley Linton who went to work so systematically to destroy it."

"Ye-s!" gasped the attendant, so utterly aghast that he no longer had the power to deny anything. "But I never dreamed you would guess, or I should not have told. How could you?"

"It was my husband who painted the picture."

She gathered up her shawl, and went out before the man had recovered from his consternation. She no longer thought of taking the picture away, or seeking a purchaser, or even of asking that it might be hung in a better light. Her mind was too full of what she had heard.

"If Dick dies," she said slowly, between her teeth, while pushing her way homeward through the streets, "Dudley Linton is his murderer! God may forgive that villain—I never will."

Something in her face when she entered the shabby little room where her husband was lying, caused his eyes to follow her wonderingly. She threw off her wraps, and drew forward a chair in silence. A red spot burned in either cheek, and her eyes were full of fire.

"What is it, Elsie?" Dick said, anxiously, after waiting a few moments for her to speak.

She turned, drawing a quick, fierce breath.

"Nothing. Don't mind me, Dick."

He looked at her more earnestly than before.

"You had better tell me," he said, after a pause. "I knew something was amiss the instant I saw your face. If there is any new trouble, dear, we will bear it together."

He spoke so gently and entreatingly that she broke down altogether. Having hidden her face in the bedclothes, no sound save her passionate sobbing disturbed the silence.

"I will speak, and have it over," she said, at last, a little excitedly. "You ought to know what cruelty and treachery has been at work. God will give you strength to bear it."

Then in a few bitter, burning words she told him all Dudley Linton had done to ruin him—what a false, unscrupulous friend he had been.

Dick bore the revelation better than she had anticipated. Indeed he had always felt vaguely distrustful of his cousin, and was in some measure prepared for what he heard.

"And so it was Dudley who wrote those cruel, blighting words?" he said, when the first fierce pang of resentment had passed. "I felt he was not good or true, but never deemed him capable of anything like that! How could he? how could he? It was a terrible thing to do!"

Elsie knelt beside him, and flung her arms tightly about his neck.

"We have found him out," she said, in a thrilling whisper, "and now his day of triumph is over."

CHAPTER XX.

AUNT JOANNA.

She bears a purse; she is a region in Guiana, all gold and bounty.

—MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

THE next morning Elsie set out on a new mission. Of course they could not accept of assistance from Dudley on any terms now, and he would scarcely offer it when he learned that his treachery had been discovered. But money must be had from some source to make Dick more comfortable, and during the silent night-watches Elsie had decided to whom she would apply.

"I'll go to that formidable aunt Joanna whom poor Dick holds in such wholesome reverence," she thought. "She may drive me from the house and shut the door in my face; but even then I shall have the satisfaction of having done what I could. I'd rather beg in the streets than see my husband suffer while he is so ill."

Her preparations were soon made. A woman who occupied the next room promised to look in occasionally, and her little daughter could sit with Dick. Elsie went away with a comparatively light heart, for she knew the child's chatter would amuse her husband, and keep his thoughts from dwelling too entirely upon their troubles.

Of course she did not tell him where she was going. A sort of pride had survived all his trials—he would have objected.

"I have an errand that may keep me from home several hours," she had said, stooping to kiss him as she tied on her bonnet. "Don't ask me what it is—I will tell you all about it when I return."

And she had flitted away before he had time to frame a single question.

Dick had described the place so well during their recent talks about aunt Joanna, that Elsie experienced no trouble in finding Miss Forsyth's residence. It was a great red brick mansion in the upper part of the city, situated so far out that it seemed quite like the country around it.

"What a beautiful place it would be with this green lawn and blooming shrubbery," Elsie thought, "if the house itself looked a trifle less lonesome and stately."

A few minutes later she had entered the frowning portals, and actually stood within the grand drawing-room with all its splendor of exquisite furniture and costly bric-a-brac. Elsie's dress was plain to shabbiness, but her sweet face and gentle manners revealed the true lady, and there had been no hesitation in admitting her. When the servant asked what name she should give Elsie had replied:

"You may simply say it is some one who has business of importance with Miss Forsyth, and has come a long distance to see her."

Three minutes later there was a rustle of silk on the stairs, and a heavy, firm step approached the door. Elsie did not even hear it. She stood under a picture that hung between the two front windows, trembling with excitement. Her wandering glance had fallen upon it the instant she was left alone. It was a very simple scene, a young girl with her hat full of flowers crossing a shallow stream, but Elsie remembered it well. Dick's picture here, in the drawing-room of the cruel relative who had discarded him! What did it mean?

A grim, sarcastic voice near at hand suddenly cut her conjectures short.

"When you have done staring at that picture I hope you will be good enough to state the nature of your 'important business,' miss."

Elsie turned with a shrill little cry. A tall, stately woman, whose wrinkled face revealed not a single soft or sympathetic line, was coldly regarding her.

"Oh," she uttered, with an involuntary sigh, as she looked at the lady, "are you Miss Forsyth?"

She had not expected any softness, but that countenance seemed harsher and more forbidding than she was prepared to find it.

"That is my name, child. What do you want?"

There was a haze before Elsie's eyes, a sudden ringing in her ears. She was nowise responsible for her next words.

"You cannot hate Dick very bitterly, or his picture would not be here. Thank God!"

"Dick's picture!" Miss Joanna Forsyth stared. She had no idea to whom her visitor

referred. She had always called her nephew Richard, and had been accustomed to hear him thus spoken of. The shorter appellation was like a new name to her.

"Dick's picture," she repeated. "For goodness's sake, what do you mean? That painting is mine, bought with my own money. I paid three hundred dollars for it."

"Three hundred dollars! And we only received seventy-five for the three that were sold at the same time."

"Are you a fool, or demented?" cried Miss Joanna angrily. "I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about."

"That picture," Elsie answered, in a dreamy tone, with a sweep of her hand toward it. "Were you not aware that my husband painted it?"

A mocking laugh broke from the woman's lips.

"You're mad, that's clear," she said; "mad as a March hare! You are not Dudley Linton's wife, are you? Good God! even you will not put forth a claim so absurd. That picture was painted by my nephew, Dudley Linton. I purchased it at a picture dealer's on Broadway. The subject struck me as a good one, very well handled, and I wanted some of Dudley's work in the house. I took two others at the same time—gave seven hundred dollars for the three."

Elsie could not restrain a cry of indignation. What a pitiful proportion of this sum had found its way to the pockets of her husband! But there was no time to think of this now. Dudley had kept back the lion's share of the money—had he deceived his aunt as well?

"How do you know Mr. Linton painted that picture?" she demanded.

"How do I know it? He told me so, to be sure. We were driving down Broadway, I remember, and I had just been scolding him for his lack of diligence. All at once he pointed out this picture in a dealer's window, and said he worked harder than I gave him credit for doing. I thought he had deceived me, perhaps, and went back to the same place afterward. Sure enough, the picture bore his name, as did two others in the same collection."

"He did deceive you, madam. The pictures were all three the work of my husband."

Miss Forsyth drew back with a smothered cry. "Who is your husband, pray?" she said, haughtily.

"Dick Forsyth."

The stout old woman put her hand to her side, shaking like one in an ague-fit.

"Not Richard?" she panted. "Not my Richard?"

"Yes."

"Good God! No," she cried out, "it isn't true. I won't believe it."

Then her face darkened, and she made a movement as though she would have torn down the picture and trampled it under foot; but desisted.

"It is false," she whispered, hoarsely. "You may be Richard's wife—I never heard whether he married, or what became of him. But that picture is not his work. No, no! Dudley did it! You cannot make me believe otherwise."

"Would Dudley have put my face into it, think you?"

Elsie confronted the irascible old lady, so that the light shone full upon her countenance, and also upon that of the young girl glowing in such tender beauty from the canvas above. One face looked older, sadder, and more careworn than the other, but they were unmistakably the same. Miss Forsyth panted with excitement, but she could not ignore the resemblance.

"Now, I think you will believe me," Elsie said.

"I—I—can't understand it. That girl has your face, certainly, but Dudley would not so impose upon me. I can't make it out."

She sunk heavily into one of the easy-chairs, and covered her face. Elsie heard her groan once or twice, like one in great mental anguish; then, all at once, she forgot Miss Joanna's harshness and stately ways, and flung herself beside her, and drew that bowed head to her shoulder.

"Try to bear it bravely," she said. "I know it is very hard when one first discovers that one has been deceived and betrayed by the person most tenderly loved and cherished. But it is better, after all, to know the truth."

"If your story is true, my nephews are both villains."

"No, Dick is good and true. I, his wife, tell you so. If Mr. Linton has deceived you in one particular, he may have done so in another. My husband has told me why you cast him off,

and declares himself innocent of the attempted crime with which he has been branded. I believe him, aunt Joanna—will not you?"

It was hard to resist that gentle, pleading voice. The proud old lady turned away, struggled a moment with her pent-up emotions, but it was of no use. She suddenly burst out sobbing like a child.

"Richard's name was a forbidden one to be spoken in my presence," she cried. "It is years since I have heard it, or uttered it. I always loved him better than the other—always. He is a Forsyth, you know. May God forgive me if I have wronged and misjudged him!"

"I think you have."

"The matter shall be thoroughly investigated. My God, I can't bear to think of it. An old woman like me to be made a tool and a dupe! It seems incredible."

They were both silent a minute; then Miss Joanna said, somewhat huskily:

"Where is Richard now? In New York?"

"Yes."

"I thought he went away."

"So he did, for a time; but he is back again. He has been ill for a long while—ill and suffering. That is what brought me here to-day. I knew you would help us when you knew our necessities."

A shudder passed through Miss Joanna's frame. She struck her side with her clenched hand.

"Richard ill—in actual want," she muttered, "and I rolling in all this luxury!"

In half a dozen sentences Elsie told their simple story. She did not spare Dudley—she could not, when she thought of poor Dick lying sick in the wretched lodgings to which his cousin's treachery, as she fully believed, had banished him. Miss Joanna's eyes were blinded with tears at first, but at the conclusion of the recital she flashed up like a volcano.

"Ah," she cried, "if all this is true, it is now Dudley's turn to feel the fury of my wrath! It shall go hard with him."

She ordered the carriage, and drove directly to the picture-dealer's of whom her purchases had been made. Elsie accompanied her, and she entered the shop leaning heavily upon the arm of the latter. The dealer himself, who knew Miss Joanna by sight, met them at the door.

"What can I show you to-day?" he blandly inquired. "We have a sunset by Gifford, and—"

She silenced him with a gesture. "Look here," she said. "I don't come to purchase, but to know the truth about a matter that intimately concerns me. No prevarications, mind. Who painted the three pictures you sold me some months ago?"

The man dropped his head, looking sadly confused.

"Why don't you answer? You said at the time they were the work of my nephew, Dudley Linton. I have reasons for thinking otherwise. What do you say now? Do you still insist that he painted them?"

He quailed under the searching gaze of her terrible eyes.

"I was told—at least I did not know—"

"Out with it," she said, relentlessly. "Did Dudley paint them, or did he not?"

"He did not," came the sullen answer. "They were left here by a lady who claimed to be the artist's wife. The name was the same as your own, madam—Forsyth. Mr. Linton happened to be in at the time, and it was to oblige him that I consented to receive the pictures. He came back afterward and said the artist was a friend whom he wished to benefit, and asked that the pictures be sold as his, Mr. Linton's, work. I knew it was an unpardonable thing to do, but I wished to oblige the young man, and—"

"Enough," Miss Joanna interrupted. "Your excuses are nothing to me. Will you be good enough to look at this young lady and say if she is the same who brought you the pictures to sell?"

The man had not particularly noticed Elsie before, but now he stared at her with a changing face.

"The very same!" he ejaculated. "I hope there was no mistake about the matter, madam—that I have done this lady's husband no injury—"

"I can't wait to explain. Moreover, nearly all wrongs are righted, even in this world, and hers will be. Come, Elsie."

As she spoke these abrupt words, Miss Joanna turned and went out. There was no change in her demeanor save that she now walked more firmly erect than usual.

From the picture-dealer's they drove directly

to the gallery where Dick's latest work, "The Wanderer," still hung. Miss Joanna went in alone—she preferred to. She was away five minutes, perhaps, then appeared and reentered the carriage.

Just at that moment a man came up hurriedly, and pushed a slip of paper into her hand.

"I saw your carriage and recognized it, ma'am," he said, respectfully touching his hat. "I was on my way to your house. Jim Benton sent me. The note will tell you why."

Miss Joanna knew the man by sight, and read at once what was written on the slip of paper.

"I am ill, and cannot last many hours. Will you come with the bearer—I have something to tell you before I die."

That was all. As soon as she had read the words, Miss Joanna signed for the man to take a seat on the box beside the driver, then leaned for a few moments pale and breathless against the cushions.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN SEARCH OF THE TRUTH.

There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave To tell us this. —HAMLET.

THEIR destination was soon reached. It was a shabby frame building in a side street not far from the river. Miss Joanna did not utter a word until they had left the carriage and, still under the guidance of the stranger, were climbing a flight of rickety stairs.

"I half divine what is coming," she said, then, leaning heavily on Elsie's arm. "James Benton lived at my house, four years ago, as a servant. He was there that dreadful night—but I cannot speak of it. Oh, how strange it would be if the whole truth of that wretched time should now come to light!"

By this time their guide had opened a door on the landing and entered. It was a large chamber, and looked quite neat and comfortable. The man approached a bed in one corner, and said to the person lying there:

"I've brought Miss Forsyth, Jim. Let me raise you up that you may speak to her with less difficulty."

He did so. Miss Joanna started visibly as her glance fell upon the face of the sick man. It was thin to emaciation, and oh, so ghastly! He was wasting away with consumption.

"What is it, James?" she said, in a kind tone of voice. "What have you to tell me?"

He hesitated, and glanced at Elsie. "You might not like me to speak in a stranger's presence," he said, very low.

"Oh, yes. It is Richard's wife. I have no secrets from her."

"Richard's wife!" he gasped, so startled and perplexed that it sent him into a violent fit of coughing, from which it took time and trouble to revive him.

"It's well that the lady is here," he added, at last, in a husky whisper. "She will be interested in what I have to say. It is nearly as good as having Richard himself. Richard's wife! What a gentle, clinging creature she is—just the sort of woman he would be sure to choose."

This was spoken in a rambling way. Then he closed his eyes, and lay still as death for a moment.

"Poor fellow! you are very weak."

The sound of Miss Joanna's voice seemed to rouse him. He looked up with a start, an anxious expression creeping over his face.

"There is no time to be lost—I must speak quickly, or it will be too late. Is it you—really you—Miss Forsyth?"

A strange wildness was in his looks and tone, but she hastened to reassure him.

"What I have to say relates to that dreadful night—I am sure you remember it as vividly as I do! Good God, what would I not give for the power to blot it from my memory! It has made life a curse and a burden to me."

"Tell me all you know concerning the events of that night," said Miss Joanna, trembling with excitement.

"I will. There was poison found in the glass of lemonade that stood at your bedside. Richard had been seen to enter your chamber shortly before you went up-stairs. A dozen little circumstances told against him—it was well known that you had made a will in his favor a few days before—he would have profited immensely by your death—and all these things led you to believe he had attempted to poison you."

Miss Joanna, writhing with anguish, struck her shriveled hands together.

"Go on," she cried. "The truth—I want the truth."

"You shall have it," he answered, breathing

heavily. "Poor Richard was innocent—it was all a plot to ruin him. I dropped the poison into the glass."

"You?" she said, glaring at him in terror. "You?"

"Yes, at Dudley Linton's instigation. It was his object to make trouble between you and Richard—to turn you against your favorite. He promised me money—to make a rich man of me. But we never meant to murder you! Oh, God, no! Believe me! believe me! We were not wicked enough for that."

Miss Joanna had sunk into a seat, her hands clenched upon her breast.

"What did you intend?" she hoarsely demanded.

"Do you not comprehend? Merely to frighten you—to make you suspicious of Richard. We expected to call attention to the poisoned lemonade before you had tasted it. Everything went wrong, however. It frightened us dreadfully when you were taken ill—Dudley almost lost his wits. He would have given his own life to save you. Don't be hard on him, madam—I know he has bitterly repented."

The sick man was growing weaker very fast. These last sentences were spoken with gasps between the words. His face changed, his head fell back upon the pillows.

"Forgive me," he cried, shrilly. "Let me die in peace. I bitterly regret having done you any wrong. Do, for God's sake, say that you forgive me."

Miss Joanna struggled with herself a moment. She did not mean to be hard, but the thought of those four, lonely years rose vividly in her mind.

"I do forgive you," she said, at last, with an effort. "You were but the tool of a greater villain, and I will not cherish resentment against you. Be at peace."

The dying man gave her a grateful look, but said no more. The stupor that so often precedes death was already coming on. He closed his eyes, and soon seemed to have forgotten her presence in the chamber.

Miss Joanna rose, presently, and went away. She looked harsh and stern, and it was only by the convulsive pressure of her hand upon Elsie's arm that the latter divined the strength of the pent-up emotions that swept her soul.

"Will you go to Dick now?" she said, half-entreatingly, as they again seated themselves in the carriage. "He will be rejoiced to see you."

Miss Joanna compressed her lips.

"Not yet. Come home with me, child. I have a painful duty to discharge, and when that is accomplished we will seek Richard together."

Elsie could not imagine what she meant by "a duty to discharge."

"My husband will be very anxious," she said. "I never left him so long before. I must send some message to relieve his fears."

"You shall."

They drove to a stationer's, and while Elsie was writing a few hasty lines to Dick, Miss Joanna penned a note on her own account. It was addressed to Dudley Linton, and she sent it to his hotel by a special messenger. It contained a request that he should come to her without delay.

Elsie, in her note to Dick, gave no inkling of the strange events that were transpiring. These were to be reserved as a surprise. She merely said that she had been detained longer than anticipated, and several hours had still to elapse before she should feel free to return.

"The dear fellow will wonder what is keeping me," she thought. "But everything will be atoned for when I bring aunt Joanna back to him. Oh, happy day!"

The drive back to that handsome brick house in the suburbs, though a very long one in fact, seemed to Elsie's excited imagination one of the briefest she had ever taken. Miss Joanna sat beside her and every few moments the grim old woman would look earnestly into her eyes and say

"God bless you, child. I am sure Richard has chosen a wife every way worthy of him, and the thought is a very pleasant one."

A surprise awaited them. Just as they entered the house a servant met them who silently beckoned her mistress to follow on to a small apartment in the rear of the drawing-room. A young woman was lying on a sofa, under the open window. Her eyes were closed, her face deathly pale, and she looked like one sunk in a stupor of exhaustion.

"Mercy on me! What have we here?" Miss Joanna ejaculated, in accents of genuine surprise.

"It's a poor thing that was found on the steps

soon after you went away this morning, ma'am. She was in a dead faint. It looked as though she had crawled up there, and could get no further."

"Some vagrant, no doubt."

"Oh, no, ma'am. Her clothes are as fine as yours, and she looks like a lady. It's my belief that she was taken suddenly ill, or fell down exhausted."

"Nonsense," said Miss Joanna, sharply. "If not a beggar, she must be something worse. A lady would not be roving about like this. Look at her gown, how soiled and bedraggled it is."

Elsie drew nearer, but it was the woman's face that fixed her attention in a moment, and caused her to forget everything else. A strikingly beautiful face it was with its clearly-cut features, drooping lids and low brow surrounded by a halo of yellow hair. She was struck by something unaccountably familiar in its expression.

"I have seen this person before," she said, starting, and pressing her hands to her head. "I cannot tell when or where, but I have certainly seen her."

At this instant there came a tremor about the stranger's drooping lids, and after glancing wildly round the room, she fixed her blue eyes inquiringly on Elsie's face.

"Where am I?" she said, in a low voice. Then, as recollection returned, a convulsive shudder shook her frame. "Oh, merciful God! It was mistaken kindness to succor one like me. Why was I not left to perish?"

"Hush!" said Miss Joanna, sternly. "You are bad enough, there's no doubt, and the world would have been better without you. But I don't want any dead people about my premises. What's the matter with you?"

Instead of replying, the young woman suddenly turned her face to the wall. Consciousness had not left her again, but she seemed too weak and ill to speak.

"Had we not better leave the poor thing alone for the present, dear aunt Joanna?" said Elsie, in a whisper. "It seems to distress her to see so many strange faces. She would do better if left quite by herself."

"Very well. I will send for a glass of wine, and something nourishing, before we go. The young person may be famished, and that's a state of affairs that cannot be permitted here."

The refreshments, when brought, were placed on a small table within reach of the sofa. The stranger did not speak or look up, or acknowledge the kindness in any manner, but lay impassive, as though sunk in a second stupor.

Aunt Joanna drew Elsie into the handsome drawing-room, leaving the door of communication ajar. "We can hear her if she calls," she said; then added with something of her old grimness:

"I expect a visitor, and desire you to meet him when he comes. Sit here, if you please, in this recess."

Elsie lifted her eyes inquiringly. The place selected was such as to screen her from the observation of any one entering at the door. It seemed very strange that Miss Joanna should wish to present her to any of her friends so soon. What did it mean?

She was not long left in doubt. A carriage rolled up to the door, and some one descended. Was it Dudley Linton? A cry broke from her lips, and she sat staring, unable to convince herself of his identity.

"Hush!" said Miss Joanna, sternly. "Try to be calm. I sent for that—that person"—she could not call him nephew again—"and desire you to be present at our interview. It will be brief, I can assure you."

Then she turned with a grim smile toward the door as heavy footsteps crossed the hall. Dudley had been more prompt in answering the summons than she anticipated.

He entered hurriedly, a shade of anxiety and perplexity on his face.

"You sent for me, aunt Joanna," he said, going close up to her, "and I am here. What is it? I feared that you might be ill, or something dreadful had occurred."

"Something has occurred." The muscles of her face were like steel as she spoke the words. "I'm glad you came quickly. A disagreeable duty is before me, and it is always a relief to have such things over."

He looked at her askance and troubled.

"How strangely you speak! What is amiss? Oh, tell me quickly."

"You will know soon enough—never fear."

At this instant his glance fell upon Elsie, who, in the excitement of the scene, had risen, and involuntarily come forward a few steps.

"Mrs. Forsyth—you here!" he gasped, with

dilated eyes and a face as gray as ashes. "Oh, why is this?"

Then, as he glanced hastily from one to the other, a conviction of the truth broke upon his mind. "Lost—lost!" he uttered, and sunk into a chair, groaning heavily.

Miss Joanna fixed her eyes on him coldly and pitilessly.

"There is no need of an explanation—I see you have divined all I would say. It is well. Now do me the favor to leave this house, never to darken its doors again. I never yet knowingly gave shelter to a hypocrite, and never will."

"There is some mistake," he stammered, trying to conceal his agitation. "Why do you look at me so harshly, and speak such cruel words?"

"You know well enough. Don't feign ignorance, or I shall despise you more than ever." And the haughty old lady drew back shrinkingly.

"But I insist upon an explanation," he persisted, resolved to brave it out. "It is my right. At present I can only divine that Mrs. Forsyth or her husband has told some scandalous story to set you against me."

She shuddered.

"Yes, it was scandalous," in a voice low and unsteady. "Oh, Dudley, I would not have believed it of you!"

He thought she was softening.

"Don't believe it!" he cried, eagerly. "Why should you? I don't know what has been said, but my cousin Richard is a desperate man, and you have seen for yourself of what he is capable—"

She stopped him with a gesture so commanding that he dared not disregard it.

"It is of no use," she said, haughtily. "I know all. James Benton has confessed. Richard will straightway be restored to the rights and privileges of which your treachery defrauded him. I have detained his wife here that she might bear witness to this declaration of my purpose. Richard takes his old place as my favorite nephew and acknowledged heir. As for you—"

"Mercy! Don't send me away! Don't cast me off utterly!" cried the wretched man, imploringly.

"It is just that you should have a taste of the misery you were so ready to bring upon another."

Something in her voice and mien told him that her mind was made up, and nothing could change it. He staggered to his feet, and was moving toward the door when a voice that thrilled his very heart suddenly spoke his name.

"Dudley! Dudley!"

He turned, a cry of wonder and terror breaking from his lips. Was it Leonie or her spirit—that beautiful though pallid vision that stood palpitating on the threshold of the door leading into the rear apartment.

CHAPTER XXII.

ELSIE'S REVELATION.

We ask

Proof of his love, and not of his honor.

—COLERIDGE.

His doubts were quickly dissolved. She made an excited forward movement, stretching out both hands in the imploring way he remembered so well. Ay, it was Leonie, his wronged love, come back as from the grave to add her testimony to that which had condemned him already.

Her first words were scarcely what he had expected.

"Oh, Dudley, don't go," she said, in a husky half-whisper. "Though all others have turned against you, I will not! My love has seemed of little worth, but you will not despise it now. It may be all that is left you. Don't be afraid, darling. Nothing can change or alienate it. It will endure forever and ever."

There was unutterable pathos in her voice, but it did not seem to move him. He stood staring at her as if stunned and stupefied. He could not imagine how she came there, in his aunt's house, or why; but it seemed that fate was doing its worst by him, just then.

After a minute's dead silence she cried, in sudden terror:

"Oh, my love, will you not even speak to me? It breaks my heart to see you look at me so strangely. You loved me once—you *did* love me—I can't think otherwise. Good God! don't tell me that the flame has burnt out utterly in your bosom! Anything but that!"

He took no notice of her outstretched arms, but looked at her in a cold, stunned fashion that well-nigh froze her blood.

"Speak to me," she implored. "One word—only one. My love, my woe, my anguish and despair cannot seem of no account to you. That is not possible."

He drew back slowly, still maintaining that dread, awful silence.

"Oh, Dudley, Dudley!" she cried, her pain and misery breaking forth more violently than ever. "You can't turn against me now, as you did before. Who in all the world would be so gentle and patient, so loving and long-suffering? Those were very bitter words you said to me the last time we met. But I can forgive them—I do forgive. It was ambition that tempted you to crush my heart under your feet. Gerald Trevlyn seemed a bride more befitting the position you hoped to win. For that reason you cast me off, and not because you loved her best. I must and will think so. It would be terrible to think otherwise."

She paused a moment and held both hands upon her heart as if to crush down its tumultuous heavings.

"Now all things are changed," she went on, speaking with apparent difficulty. "Your prospects are ruined, or nearly so—some wrong or crime has stripped you of wealth and friends. I don't know what you have done—I will never even inquire. It is nothing to me. I care for nothing but your love—nothing. Give me that and I will go with you contentedly to the end of the world. I will suffer and die for you, if need be. But don't forsake me now, in the trouble and disgrace that has overtaken you."

Her anguish and pathos might have melted a heart of stone, but it only awakened in Dudley's breast a deeper sense of his own lost and ruined condition. Matters must look hopeless indeed when Leonie could forget pride, self-respect, modesty, everything to plead with him like this.

"Hush!" he panted, angrily, when speech came at last. "Let me hear no more. I have fallen low enough—you shall not drag me down to deeper infamy."

"Infamy!" she repeated. "I! Infamy!"

Something in the slow, incredulous tones brought tears to Elsie's eyes; but Dudley was only moved to greater brutality by them.

"Yes, you!" he cried, striking down with one angry blow the hand she again involuntarily extended. "I will speak very plainly, since I must. I don't know why you are here, or for whose benefit this scene has been enacted. But if you hope to gain anything by it, the result will fall far short of your expectations."

These bitter, scathing words were his last. He turned the instant they were uttered, and went out. Leonie heard him drive away, then threw herself, face downward, on the sofa. Not a cry, not a sound came from her lips, but she looked like one stricken.

Elsie knelt beside her, prompted by the true womanly instinct, and tried to say something. But the wound had penetrated too deep—that palsied heart no longer vibrated to the touch of sympathy.

Miss Joanna looked anxious and troubled. The whole scene, from the moment Leonie appeared on the threshold like a specter, till those last scathing words were uttered by Dudley, had been utterly incomprehensible. She struck herself sharply to be sure she was awake.

"Good God!" she cried. "This is all very strange. I do not comprehend it. In all my sixty odd years I never saw the like. Is this young woman really a friend of Dudley's?"

"She is more than a friend to him," said Elsie, solemnly.

"More! What do you mean by that? You must speak plainer," and the proud old lady gasped a little. "Surely she is not—his mistress?"

"Not that, thank God! She is his wife."

Miss Joanna fell back as though she had received a blow.

"His wife? Oh, no, no! Impossible."

"She is. I can bear witness to the fact, if necessary."

"You? How can this thing be?" She pressed her hands to her forehead. "Why, Dudley is betrothed to Gerald Trevlyn. They would have been married ere this but for her father's sudden death. And now you declare he is the husband of this young woman. It cannot be!"

"But it is," Elsie firmly persisted. "The moment I saw this unhappy creature her countenance seemed strangely familiar. While she was speaking to Mr. Linton it came to me like a flash where and when I had seen her. I was a witness to her marriage with that man!"

At these words Leonie sat up suddenly and stared at her with dilated eyes—they had acted almost like a galvanic shock.

"You saw us married?" she slowly repeated. "You?"

"Yes. I came from New England, and have not been long in this city. It was months before I came that the marriage was solemnized, just at dusk, in a country church—"

"Yes, yes," Leonie interrupted, wildly, "you must have been there, though I saw you not. How vividly that scene and hour are stamped upon my memory!"

"I saw the light, and crept in at the open door, curious to learn what was going on," Elsie said. "A friend was with me. We hid ourselves in a dark corner behind the high-backed pews and witnessed everything."

A strong, convulsive shudder shook Leonie's frame, and she said after a pause:

"It was no marriage you beheld. Dudley had deceived me. It is the old story—one of his boon companions played the rôle of priest."

"Did he tell you so?"

"Yes—long afterward. The revelation nearly killed me."

"It need not. Mr. Linton was the victim in that case, and not you, poor innocent soul!"

"What do you mean?" gasped Leonie, struck more by her new friend's manner than the words themselves.

"I will tell you. Mr. Penfold, the clergyman in charge, got wind of what was going on. He felt it would be a just thing to do—to save an innocent girl from ruin, and teach a bad man a needed lesson. I don't know how he managed, but it is certain that he performed the ceremony himself. It was as binding as the law could make it."

Leonie fell back with a cry of joy. "Thank God," she said, and burst into wild tears. "Oh, why did I not know of this before?"

"Mr. Penfold intended to explain everything the moment the ceremony was concluded. But something called him away—he had simply stepped into the vestry to change his robes, I think—and when he returned you and Mr. Linton had disappeared. He felt very much distressed, for you were both strangers in that part of the country and had left no address. Much as he desired to do so, it was no longer possible to assure your husband that a *bona fide* marriage had been consummated."

Leonie looked up eagerly. "I am Dudley's wife—his wife?" she cried, eagerly. "There can be no doubt of that?"

"None whatever."

"Thank God," she said again, and with a long, deep sigh covered her eyes and lay motionless once more, as though trying to realize the truth.

Miss Joanna looked pale and stern, but she felt it a relief to know that Dudley was actually married to the poor soul.

"Better that than something worse," she thought. "Dudley can do as he pleases about acknowledging her, for I shall take her under my especial care, and see that she bears his name."

The good woman never once dreamed of associating Leonie with the "Miss West" Robert Trevlyn had married. Notwithstanding the engagement, she was not on intimate terms with the Trevlyns, and never visited there. The case, therefore, had complications she did not yet divine.

Meanwhile the day was slipping by, and night rapidly coming on. Elsie could no longer restrain her impatience to be with Dick, and tell him all that had transpired. Oh, what a wonderful day it had been!—how blessed for her and Dick—how bitter for poor erring Dudley!

"Let me go to my husband," she said at last, pulling at Miss Joanna's sleeve. "Remember how lonely he is—and all I have to say to him."

"You shall go," and the stern old woman stroked her hand with unusual gentleness. "It would be cruel to detain you longer. I will order the carriage at once."

They soon departed, leaving Leonie wide awake, though lying quite still, with an expression that seemed almost peaceful upon her pale, worn face.

When they reached the narrow side street, where Dick and Elsie lodged, Miss Joanna looked all round with a pained expression. The place seemed even poorer than she expected.

"Poor Richard," she said. "Poor fellow! He has lived in a wretched hole like this, and I had money enough and to spare! Can I ever forgive myself?"

"Oh," said Elsie, cheerfully, "we were quite comfortable here for a while—as long as our means lasted. It is incomparably better than the miserable attic in which I found my husband ill and dying of starvation."

Miss Joanna felt a choking sensation in her throat. During all her pampered life she had

never before come in such violent contact with poverty and suffering.

"Go on, quickly," she said, pushing Elsie into the dark little hall. "I must have it over—I could not breathe long in an atmosphere like this."

Elsie went quickly up-stairs; but at the chamber door she paused and drew back.

"My husband is weak and ill—had I not better go in first, and prepare him?"

"No. I have waited so long—I cannot wait another minute."

For a breath-long space she clung, pale and panting, to the door, then went blindly on into the chamber. A moment's dead silence, broken by a shrill cry of rapture.

"Aunt Joanna, is it you? Have you come to me at last?"

The voice was Dick's, but so broken and tremulous as to be scarcely recognizable. Miss Joanna knelt beside him on the floor, and burst into tears.

"Richard, forgive me!" she cried. "It is so terrible to find you like this! Only say that you forgive me."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE END OF THE GAME.

I will indulge my sorrows, and give way
To all the pangs and fury of despair.

—ADDISON.

DUDLEY LINTON passed a wretched night—the most miserable in all his experience. He felt that he had played a desperate game and lost.

Lost, but not all, perhaps. There still remained one venture to be tried. If Geraldine loved him, truly and devotedly, she would overlook everything and give him an opportunity to retrieve his position. Women are weak and yielding when a real passion sits enthroned in their hearts, and Geraldine was like all the rest. She had spoken in the heat of the moment when she declared all at an end between them.

"With her ample fortune under my control, I could hold my head as high as aunt Joanna or Richard, and defy them to do their worst," he thought, sullenly.

It was a gray, gloomy morning, the sky overcast, and a sobbing wind sighing through the streets, when Dudley set out for the Trevlyn mansion. He felt like cursing the day, his own hard luck, everything and anything that had helped bring him to such a pass.

Geraldine stood by the drawing-room window when he entered, looking sadder than usual, and rather pale. The arrest of Ray Armitage, charged with the murder of her father, had disturbed her in no measured degree. She could not believe him guilty, though Garnet's evidence against him had been of the plainest and most direct sort.

"The child's brain is turned," she had sadly said to herself, "and she does not realize the wickedness and injustice of the terrible accusation under which Ray now suffers. Oh, what shall I do—what shall I do to clear him and bring the truth to light?"

It was while this problem harassed her almost to madness that Dudley appeared on his new mission. He could not well have hit upon a time less propitious.

She heard his step approaching, but only turned her head the least bit in the world. No look of joy, no welcoming smile lighted up her face. That grave, impassive expression still prevailed.

"Geraldine," he exclaimed, springing impetuously to her side, "you are wretched—you are suffering."

"Yes," she replied, in a little hollow voice; "my trials are greater than I can bear."

"Why is it? Who is to blame? Have I—"

"You!" she interrupted, hastily. "No, do not reproach yourself. You have nothing to do with what I suffer. It is the terrible series of events going on so ceaselessly, and daily bringing some new calamity to the surface, that tries me so."

"You mean Ray Armitage's arrest," he cried, with a pang of jealous misery. "You are grieving over it. You feel the shame and dishonor that has come upon him more than anything else that has occurred!"

"Yes, I feel it keenly," she confessed; "more keenly than I would have deemed possible."

Dudley turned deadly pale.

"Take care," he said, with a gasp, "or you will lead me to think you love that man."

Geraldine flushed crimson, and drawing back with an expression of deep displeasure, burst without warning into wild tears.

"He slept in a prison-cell last night. He is

charged with a horrible crime—murder! Oh, it kills me to think of it!"

"I don't know how you can spare any pity for a wretch like him," said Dudley, tremulously. "His very name ought to fill you with loathing and horror. Remember, it is your father's life he is suspected of having taken."

"He is not guilty!" cried Geraldine, with a shudder. "I can't believe it—I will not!"

He glanced curiously into her working face, and seemed to grow deadly sick. But he said, after a slight hesitation:

"I heard the evidence against him, and to my mind it is perfectly conclusive."

"That is because you hate him," she said, violently. "I believe you are secretly rejoicing over his downfall. Everybody is ready to turn against a fellow-creature in trouble. But it does not matter. I shall not forsake him. Never!"

Dudley clenched his hands with jealous rage.

"We won't speak of him," he said, after another brief pause. "The subject drives me beside myself. Oh, Geraldine, I came here to assure myself of your love! It is very hard to be met with unhappy looks and bewailings because of the misfortunes of a rival."

"You introduced the subject."

"It was a mistake—let it be banished. Geraldine, you do not know what a dreadful night I have spent. I thought of you continually, and what it would cost to give you up. I could not bear it—I could not. Surely, dear love, you will not break faith with me?"

She fixed her eyes on him very coldly.

"When I said that all was at an end between us, Dudley, I meant it."

"What if I hold you to your engagement?"

"You can do so if you will," she answered, a sudden flash in her blue eyes, "but that would make me all the more determined to obtain my freedom."

He bit his lip. It would be poor policy to pursue this point, and he suffered it to drop.

"Think of my love and misery," he said, with real feeling. "Are they nothing to you? It would be a cruel blow to cast me off after all I have been led to expect. My whole life would be blighted and ruined—I should never know another happy hour."

"This is idle," she said, with a weary air. "My mind is made up—nothing can change it. Perhaps it is no more than just to tell you that you have fallen from the place you once held in my estimation, and can never be reinstated."

"Fallen?" he echoed. "How? Why?"

"Must I tell you?" she ejaculated, with a desperate sound of pain. "No, no, I will not! It is unnecessary—you must know already. You loved another before me—perhaps love that other still. I do not ask in what relation she stood to you—or even wish to know. It is enough that she is still true to you, and that your first duty is to her. Go; make her happy if you can. I wish it so."

"Curse her!" he said, between his teeth. "I will never see her again, so help me God!"

"Think you such a resolve will make any change in our relations? No!"

He looked at her wildly, imploringly.

"Is it possible that you have ceased to love me?" he said, in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes," she replied. "I had better wound you deeply now rather than leave anything for illusive hopes to build upon. We were both deceived—your image could not have been so fondly cherished as I imagined, or it would be less easy to banish it now. You and I have nothing more to say—except good-by."

Dudley begged, pleaded, implored, but in vain. She heard him through, with a strange weariness in her look. There was no softening or relenting. The subject seemed only to distress her. Her mind had been made up for all time, and when the young man fully realized this, at last, he rose without another word, and passed unsteadily from the room. His last card had been played, and now he must acknowledge himself beaten.

He had scarcely gained the open air before he found himself face to face with a forlorn figure that stood listlessly in the path. Leonie! He stared at her in a dazed way, rubbed his eyes, and finally broke out in a volley of curses. It was too much to be confronted by her just then, when he realized so vividly what she had lost for him.

She did not speak until he was done, but stood looking at him so meekly and patiently that any other tongue must have been silenced at the second word.

"How dared you come here again?" he said, at the last. "Here, where you have wrought so much misery?"

Then she answered him.

"Forgive me, Dudley. I felt sure of finding you—nothing else could have induced me to come. When I have spoken a few words to you I will go away."

He did not ask what they were. The expression of his face was terrible.

"Stand out of the way," he said, hoarsely. "I have endured enough without listening to your complaints."

"One moment," she cried, dropping her hand upon his arm. "There is something you ought to be told, Dudley—something I found out yesterday after you left me. It relates to our marriage."

He did not speak, but fixed his eyes on her with a sudden show of interest.

"You have been laboring under a delusion," she went on, softly, almost deprecatingly. "It was a real marriage, after all. I have been your wife all the while—through this whole season of trial and sorrow. Your wife, Dudley."

For a moment his limbs shook under him. Then, recovering his usual effrontery, he cried, violently:

"What new madness is this? Do you think to deceive me by so shallow a claim? It will not do!"

An oath gave emphasis to the words. But Leonie seemed undismayed.

"It was a real clergyman who married us, Dudley," she said, "and the ceremony cannot be set aside. If you have a single doubt of this, go and investigate."

But he did not doubt—at least greatly. The conviction that it might be even so was coming home slowly to his mind. Some facts to which he had never alluded in Leonie's presence, had troubled him from the first, and this new revelation explained them fully. Even if Geraldine had not turned against him it would have been impossible to make her his wife!

In the meantime Geraldine had left the drawing-room and gone up-stairs. She was passing on wearily to her own chamber when a sound fell on her ears—Garnet's voice raised almost to a hysterical scream.

She hurried in to see what was the matter. The child was sitting up in bed, her eyes fixed wildly on the open window. Mrs. Webb's detaining hand was all that prevented her from springing out, apparently.

"What is it?" Geraldine said, hastily. "What has happened to excite you so?"

"Listen," breathed the child. "There it is again—Leonie's voice! She is here—she has come back to us!"

A moment's dead silence, and she, too, heard the sound that had attracted Garnet's attention. It came in through the open window—a murmur so low that only an ear delicately attuned could have caught it at all. Involuntarily her eyes met Mrs. Webb's, and both began to tremble.

"Go," said Garnet, wildly. "Bring her here to me."

"Hush. Try to calm yourself."

"Bring Leonie to me," the child repeated, in a resolute tone.

"She is in the grounds; some one is with her," said Geraldine, glancing from the window.

"It is Dudley. They are conversing."

"No matter. Bring her here," Garnet persisted, her cheeks flushing, her eyes growing wilder every moment. "She is alive—well—back again! Oh, it seems too good to be true. I feared she might be dead. Go, this instant!"

But it was a mission from which Geraldine shrunk.

"Be patient," she exhorted. "Leonie will come of her own accord if she really wishes to see you."

"No, no. She might not feel herself welcome. She has been persecuted and ill-treated in this house. You must go and bring her in. There is no other way."

"I could not do it."

"You shall!" screamed Garnet, flinging herself half off the bed. "I will see her. She is the only friend I have. If you refuse, I'll go for her myself."

It was useless contending with one so determined, and Geraldine reluctantly yielded. When she reached the garden, Dudley and Leonie still stood in the path. They did not see her, and she was going straight up to them when a sentence she heard caused her to pause irresolute.

"Great God! You don't think it was I who murdered Robert Trevlyn? Oh, God, no!"

"I do think it," was the answer. "I have thought it all along. Not coldly and deliberately—you would lack the nerve for that. But in a frenzy of passion, anguish, or fear you would be capable of anything. It was your hand."

Leonie, and none other, that laid him low."

She drew back with a gasp and a shudder.

"Mine!" she exclaimed, weakly. "You are trying me—you don't believe it—you can't believe it! Why, I feared—I was sure—"

"Well, tell me what you feared?"

"That you had done the deed!"

It was out at last, the secret conviction each had been cherishing all this while concerning the other, and as their eyes met in a long bitter look, a wave of mutual repulsion seemed to tear them suddenly asunder.

At this instant Geraldine heard a smothered groan at her elbow, and turning her head saw Mrs. Webb standing close beside her. She, too, had caught every word.

"Garnet! How could you leave her?" gasped Geraldine, solicitude for her sister's welfare rising uppermost even at that terrible moment.

The woman paid no attention. "He has accused her!" she muttered, as if speaking to herself. "This is too much! too much!"

Just then a small figure clad all in white came running down the path. A horrified cry burst from Geraldine's lips—it was Garnet herself! The child darted past before she could be arrested, but stopped, a few steps further on, as though her feet had been suddenly glued to the ground.

"Leonie, I want you," she cried, "and would trust no one to bring you—"

The words died on her lips. Her features suddenly became rigid, her eyes fixed on a point in space just beyond where Leonie was standing.

"My God!" she screamed. "He is there—papa! How pale, how deathly and emaciated he looks! See, he frowns and shakes his head at me. He seems displeased! Now he comes this way. Oh, for the love of Heaven, restrain him! I shall die if he touches me—I shall surely die!"

She retreated a few steps, wavered a moment, then with a second shrill, blood-curdling scream, fell senseless at Geraldine's feet.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW IT HAPPENED.

Ever on her soul a shadow lies.—MRS. PIERSON.

THAT night it was known to all in the house that Garnet had met with a relapse, and there was no possibility that she could recover.

How she had found strength to leave her bed and follow Geraldine and Mrs. Webb to the garden, was a mystery to everybody. It must have been done in delirium, and the evanescent power born of it.

Leonie remained in the house, to be at hand if Garnet called for her. But Dudley Linton had gone away immediately—no one knew where.

It was a terrible vigil that Geraldine kept beside her sister's couch. Garnet was restless and wild, wandering from one misery to another, muttering incoherently, and babbling unceasingly of murder and horror. A terrible burden seemed to rest upon her mind, crushing out her very heart.

Geraldine tried to shut her ears to these ravings, but in vain. She attempted, unsuccessfully, to occupy her mind solely with the conjectures to which the strange words she had overheard in the garden gave rise. But in the very midst of some plausible theory, a single exclamation from Garnet's burning lips would dash the whole fabric to the ground.

Toward evening Detective Hine made his appearance—she had sent for him quite early in the day. She saw him for five minutes alone in the study.

"Don't leave the house again," she said to him, "until I am ready to dismiss you. The mystery that has enshrouded my father's death is, I believe, about to be made known."

He looked at her, struck by her pallor, and the low, hollow voice in which she spoke.

"What have you discovered, Miss Trevlyn?"

"Nothing," she answered. "And yet I have a feeling that the truth will soon come to light."

"Of course you can give a reason for the conviction?"

She drew back with a shrinking gesture, as though not wishing to continue the subject.

"There is something I ought to tell you, perhaps," she said, after a short silence. "You can make what you please out of it."

Word for word she repeated the terrible sentences that had passed between Dudley and Leonie in which each had hinted at a suspicion that the other was guilty of Mr. Trevlyn's death.

"Was it a blind on the part of one to test the other, or are they both innocent?" she said, anxiously.

Mr. Hine shook his head.

"Wait," was the only answer he made.

It occurred to him, however, that Geraldine was keeping back something—that she had fears and suspicions of which she dreaded to speak, and from which she would fain have diverted his attention.

Some hours later she was sitting alone by Garnet's bedside when her incoherent mutterings suddenly ceased, and she sat bolt upright with a piercing shriek.

"There he is!" she cried, glaring fixedly into one corner of the apartment. "He has come again. I knew he would."

"Be calm," said Geraldine, soothingly. "There is no one here."

"Don't you see him? He stands behind that chair, leaning over it, and looking at me!" And the sick child clung to her sister, trembling with fear and horror.

"Who is it?" Geraldine forced herself to ask.

"Papa! See, he shakes his head, and makes signs to me. I know what it is that displeases him. He does not wish Ray Armitage to suffer for a crime of which he is innocent, and he thinks me cowardly and vindictive for permitting it. There—I told you so!" she shrieked, suddenly striking her hands together. "Now he smiles, and nods approval. He thinks I will save him! Oh, my God, how can I? How can I?"

Geraldine felt herself turn sick with dread and expectation, but she managed to falter:

"Can you save him, my sister? Is it in your power?"

"No, no. I won't be frightened or coaxed into betraying myself. Don't think it."

She fell back, and with a convulsive effort gathered the bedclothes over her eyes. Thus she lay sweating and trembling for a long while.

At midnight another of these frenzy fits came on. It was even more terrible than the first. She threw herself against the wall at the back of the bed, and her eyes seemed fairly starting from their sockets.

"Keep him away!" she shrieked. "He has come nearer this time—he stands beside my pillow. His lips move, and oh, he looks so sorrowful. Good God, how can I suffer this? Must I tell all to be rid of him?"

"Yes," said Geraldine, gently; "if there is anything on your mind, you had better unburden it."

Garnet did not seem to hear. She gasped once or twice, the livid look of horror slowly passed from her countenance, and she hid it with a wild burst of sobs in the clothes.

Once again was this scene repeated ere dawn, and the morning had not progressed far until Garnet awoke, as though from a dream, conscious but despairing. She seemed to feel intuitively that the end was near.

After glancing aimlessly round the room for a few moments she fixed her eyes on Geraldine's face.

"Am I going to die?" she asked.

Her sister could not deceive her. There was no verbal reply, but a burst of dry sobs was sufficient answer.

"I—I—am afraid. I did not expect this. It is terrible. Can you tell me how long I have to live?"

"Only a few hours."

"Ah!" she cried, with a low, desperate sound of pain.

After a short silence she looked up, and spoke again.

"Who is in the house? Who besides Mrs. Webb and the servants, I mean?"

"Mr. Hine and—Mrs. Trevlyn."

"Mr. Hine is the detective, I believe. So much the better. Go, bring him and Leonie here. I have something to say in the presence of you all."

They came. The child made a feeble effort, and stretching out her hand clasped Leonie's closely. But she appeared oblivious to the detective's presence.

"I wish to make a confession," she said, ere long. "I could not die without it. I have been warned again and again, and dare hold out no longer. Both heaven and hell might cast me out were I to pass into eternity with my lips sealed."

A moment's silence. Geraldine placed a cordial to the sufferer's lips, and she soon continued:

"I have a word to say, first of all, about Ray Armitage. It was I who set papa against him. I always disliked him—it may have been because he seemed secretly to despise me, invariably treating me as a spoiled, wayward child. I took the money he was accused of stealing—took it, not because I wanted or needed it, for papa always supplied my purse liberally, but simply to bring the odor of the crime upon Ray,

and alienate him and my father more hopelessly than ever.

"Now let me hasten to the events of the night that has been such a terrible memory to us all. For days beforehand it had been evident to me that things were going wrong. I had somehow got the impression that Ray was secretly working to win your affections from papa, dear Leonie. I knew you stole forth nearly every evening to meet some one, and circumstances led me to think it was Ray.

"He never came to the house, to be sure, but I imagined he had contrived to make your acquaintance somewhere else.

"That night the devil took possession of me. I did not see you leave the house, but when I knew you were gone I took a loaded revolver from papa's desk, and followed."

"You!" ejaculated Geraldine, in a hollow voice. "Was it really you who took the revolver from the place where it was kept?"

"Yes. But don't interrupt—I am growing weaker every minute. In the grounds I met you, my sister, as you must remember. You attempted to detain me—to send me back. Oh, would that you had succeeded!

"I must have been mad that night. When I came near the summer-house papa stood on the steps. I could see in the moonlight that he looked pale and excited. Hearing footsteps I crouched low in the shrubbery and waited. A man disguised in a long cloak and hat approached. I thought it was Ray, and before he or papa could utter a word, I had leveled the revolver and fired."

"Good God!" Geraldine cried out. "You! It is too horrible! Did you kill papa?"

The child's ravings during the night had led her to suspect something of the sort, but now that confession had been made it seemed more difficult than ever to believe it."

Garnet shuddered.

"Of course I never meant to do it," she said, brokenly. "They were standing near each other, and—I don't know whether my hand trembled, or why it was, but the wrong man was struck down. Oh, God! what have I not suffered since! I've died a thousand deaths!"

"But why did you not tell us at the time how it happened?"

"I had no strength to do it, at first, and when I came to myself a little I dared not. Mrs. Webb has known for some time, but I bound her by a solemn promise not to tell. Soon the thought of leaving Ray Armitage to suffer for my crime suggested itself. He was really answerable for all that had occurred, I told myself, and deserved to be punished."

"You were laboring under a delusion," said Leonie. "I do not know Mr. Armitage. It was Dudley Linton I went to meet."

"Was it his custom to disguise himself at such times?"

"Yes, in the manner of which you speak. He and I had parted at the summer-house only a few moments before. It was Dudley you saw and mistook for Mr. Armitage, there can be no doubt."

Garnet sighed, and seemed to sicken at the thought. Everything looked clear to her now—all the circumstances comprehensible.

So they did to Leonie, also. She understood what had led Dudley to suspect herself of the crime. He had heard the report of the revolver without seeing whose hand held it, and when Mr. Trevlyn fell dead at his feet, had fled precipitately to avoid being mixed up in the terrible event. Knowing Leonie's trouble and despair, and that she had been on the spot just before, he had been led to think she had committed the deed in a moment of madness.

Garnet moved uneasily, and said with a last supreme effort:

"It is over now—what is done cannot be recalled. I would have braved it out to the last, and died with my secret untold, but he, papa, would not suffer it. I have seen him again and again during the past twenty-four hours. He has given me no rest—he wishes the truth known, Ray cleared of a terrible charge, and now it is done. Forgive me, Geraldine; ask Ray to forgive—"

Her voice broke; the end was a groan. She lay for some moments perfectly tranquil, then gave a wild start, a convulsive shudder, and all was over.

Poor child! though wayward and erring, she had suffered more than often falls to the lot of mortal, and we can afford to drop a tear of pity over her sad destiny.

CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER THE TEMPEST.

Truth crushed to earth will rise again;
The eternal years of God are hers.

—BRYANT.

THE first thing to be done was to effect Ray Armitage's release from prison, and this duty Geraldine delegated to Mr. Hine, the detective.

"You have influence with those in authority," she said, in a strange, subdued voice, "and can manage this business better than anybody else. Spare poor Garnet's memory all that is possible—but if it must be so, let the whole truth be disclosed."

"You can trust me," the detective said. "The evidence of Mr. Armitage's innocence must be told to a few, but need never be given to the public."

"There must be no unnecessary delay in accomplishing his release."

"He shall be a free man before the sun sets," Geraldine put her hand to her brow as if in pain.

"Ask him to come here at once," she said. "I wish to see him that I may say how sorry I am for what he has suffered through me and mine."

"I will."

Mr. Hine was going away hurriedly, but on the threshold he looked back to add:

"I feel like confessing how astonished I am at the *dénouement* of this case, Miss Trevlyn. I never knew another like it. It has baffled me from first to last. Numberless theories have been formed in my own mind, then exploded. In all my experience I was never so beaten."

She looked down, trembled a little, but made no response.

"My suspicions have been pretty evenly divided between Mr. Armitage, Mr. Linton and Mrs. Trevlyn. I felt assured one of the three was the guilty person. They pointed first to one, then to another, just as the facts coming to light seemed to indicate. My convictions were perpetually shifting like a weather-vane at the sport of variable winds."

"No matter. The truth is known at last," said Geraldine, very quietly.

"I never dreamed of accusing that child," he persisted. "Her youth, her misfortunes, and helplessness were so many shields to ward off suspicion. Even the relation in which she stood to the dead was a protection. It never once occurred to me to doubt her."

Geraldine turned painfully away.

"The subject is a most distressing one," she said; "let us not continue it."

An hour or so later she went to seek Leonie, and found her sitting alone, her face buried in her hands.

"I have not been altogether just to you," she said, stretching out her hand. "Circumstances led me to think worse of you than I had any right to think. I am sorry—will you forgive me?"

"Freely and fully," Leonie replied, in a broken voice. "You have far more to forgive than I. It is very good and noble of you to come with the first overtures."

"Are we to be better friends in future?"

"If you really desire it," said Leonie, pressing to her lips the hand she now held. "I have always wished it might be so. I could love you dearly if you would let me."

Tears rose in Geraldine's eyes; she could not repress them. Suffering had softened her whole nature, and the two wept together.

Afterward they had a long, quiet talk, and came to a better understanding. Leonie related her whole sad history, and it caused the listener's tears to flow afresh.

"There is one person in this house who knows all the particulars of my early life," she said, in conclusion. "I refer to Mrs. Webb. She is my aunt, and until some three years ago resided in the same place that I did."

Geraldine looked surprised.

"Why did you never acknowledge the relationship?" she inquired.

"I had not the courage, and she never seemed to wish it. I did not feel like making any revelation whatever that would throw light upon my past life, or cause inquiry. Think of the terrible secret I had to keep!"

"Take courage; your troubles are over now. You shall remain here, and be as a sister to me."

"Here!" Leonie echoed, her face which had been pale before flushing crimson. "Recollect I have no right to trespass upon your goodness. If my first marriage was legal—and there can now be no doubt of it—I was never your father's wife, and cannot bear his name."

Geraldine shrunk a little in spite of herself.

She was sensitive to disgrace, and it had never come so nigh as of late.

"You have no other home," she said, after a short silence, "no place to which you can go for refuge."

"True."

"Then it is right and best that you should remain."

"Do you really wish it?" was the anxious inquiry.

"Yes. The world looks upon you as my father's widow, and need not be undeceived. A great scandal will be saved if nothing is said abroad. For that reason, if for no other, you must remain quietly here for the present."

Of course Leonie consented.

"You are very, very good, Geraldine," she murmured, in a broken voice. "You are treating me a thousand times better than I deserve."

At a late hour that evening Ray Armitage made his appearance. Mr. Hine had fulfilled his promise, and accomplished the young man's release after a merely nominal examination, and now he had come in compliance with Geraldine's request. He knew the whole dreadful truth.

"I hope you have forgiven my poor sister," Geraldine said to him. "She did you a bitter wrong, but death atones for all."

"Yes, death atones for all," he repeated. "There is not a single vindictive thought in my heart. Poor Garnet! may she rest in peace."

Geraldine looked at him mournfully.

"I hope you believe, as I do, that my sister was not responsible for her actions? Sickness and suffering had unsettled her mind, and she did not realize the infamy of the wrongs committed."

"Yes," he said, "I have thought for a long time she was not altogether sane. But it is over and done with; let us not dwell upon that bitter trouble now. I pity her more than words can express."

Geraldine caught his hand and bedewed it with grateful tears. How good and noble he was, how manly and generous! He had not even a reproach to cast at one who had branded him with her own crime, and would have left him to pay the penalty but for Heaven's retributive justice!

"I never realized his real worth," she thought, panting; "but I do now—I do now."

Dudley Linton had kept aloof during all these later events, and the next day Geraldine drove to his hotel. She wished to see him, but it was in Leonie's behalf.

"I must know what he intends to do," she said to herself. "If he is willing to acknowledge his wife, means shall be furnished them to go to Europe and live there in retirement for a year or two. It can be managed in such a way that only a few friends will know they have gone together."

Her mission was a vain one, however. She found Dudley's apartments at the hotel in the wildest disorder—books, trinkets and articles of masculine finery scattered about with only a bewildered chamber-maid to give an account of the chaos that reigned.

"Mr. Linton has gone for good and all," explained the girl. "He left yesterday morning, quite sudden like, taking one small trunk along. I has my orders to pack all his belongings in them boxes you saw standing outside the door; and they are to be kept until called for."

"Do you know where Mr. Linton went?"

"I don't, ma'am, except that he is to travel in the South a while. For the good of his health, I believe."

"Of course he did not say when he would return?"

"No, ma'am. He hadn't made up his mind, it seems."

Geraldine returned home, and immediately told the forsaken wife what she had learned. Leonie seemed scarcely surprised. A sadder shade crossed her white, desperate face, but she said, resignedly:

"He does not love me—he intends to discard me utterly. It is hard—but with God's help—I can bear it. I shall never see him again."

She was mistaken; she did see him, but not until many weary weeks had passed.

August came in hot and sultry. One breathless, burning morning late in the month, Leonie sat alone in her chamber, brooding over her sorrows, when she became conscious of an excited stir in the hall below. Presently she heard Geraldine's voice calling to her.

Miss Joanna Forsyth was down-stairs. Leonie thought nothing of this at first, for quite intimate relations had been established between the two families during these weeks. It was

not until she had a good view of Miss Joanna's face that a sudden fear clutched her heart. The woman held a slip of paper in her hand, and when she saw it, Leonie felt at once that something had happened.

"You have bad news," she panted. "Is it of—of—Dudley? Tell me at once—I can bear it."

"Yes, that graceless scamp has come to light," Miss Joanna said, sharply, though her lips quivered a little. "I knew he would. This telegram reached me an hour ago. I brought it here, thinking you might wish to see it."

"Yes, yes. Give it to me!"

She put out her hand wildly and grasped the paper. A blur came before her eyes, however; she could not make out a single word.

"Read it," she said, with a cry of despair. "I cannot."

Miss Joanna looked at her curiously.

"Are you quite prepared?" she said, with a sudden touch of pity. "The tidings may be worse than you imagine."

"For God's sake let me know all at once."

Miss Joanna took the dispatch, and read, not without some signs of hesitation, these words:

"DEAR MADAM:—Dudley Linton is lying very ill in one of the hospitals here in Memphis, stricken down with yellow fever. I find upon his person a card bearing your address, and send this message to you, though uncertain whether you are a relative of his, or only a friend. His family, if he has any, should be notified of his condition."

The name signed to the message was "William Brown."

Leonie leaned against the wall a moment, gasping for breath. She took in the full meaning of those words. For many days terrible tidings had been coming from the fever-stricken South. Dudley was there, in the very heart of the plague-cursed district! his life hanging on a thread! neglected, forsaken, it might be, or at best with only hired nurses to soothe his sufferings!

The thought stirred every pulse of her being. At once she was calm and self-collected.

"Will you order the carriage, Geraldine?" she said, hurriedly. "I must pack a few things, and change my dress. I shall take the next train for the South."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Miss Joanna. "Do you know what a risk you would run? It would be as much as your life is worth to go to Memphis, now."

"I must go," she panted. "He is there—he needs me. Nothing shall keep me from him, now."

The woman uttered a smothered exclamation, but her eyes were full of tears.

"Well, well! He ain't worth it, but—God bless and keep you!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

WOMAN'S DEVOTION.

—O'er the trembling city the curse
Hangs brooding o'er the music it hath stilled
In many hearts and homes.

—ANON.

It was early evening when Leonie reached her destination, but the streets of the great city seemed strangely silent and deserted. It was easy to believe that the angel of death had swept suddenly over the place, smiting all its inhabitants with the sword. Gloom and desolation everywhere! No happy faces, no ring of merry voices, no sounds of bustling life or busy traffic. Two grim specters, pestilence and death, stalking ahead, had swept all these things out of their path as a whirlwind gathers everything before it.

Alone and unprotected, Leonie made the round of the hospitals, and it was midnight before she found the one in which her husband lay ill. A large, roomy old mansion in the suburbs of the city had been given up to the use of the fever sufferers, and hither some good, kind soul had conveyed Dudley Linton at the outset of the disease.

The door stood open, and Leonie stalked over the threshold like a spirit. The solitary man, who sat dozing in the hall, started to his feet, and stared at her as though doubtful whether she was flesh and blood or not.

"Who are you, and why do you come here?" he demanded.

"I am looking for my husband. I was told he was here. Quick! let me go to him."

Something in her voice made the man stare harder than ever.

"We have orders to admit no one," he answered. "It is very late—the wards are all closed for the night."

"I must see my husband."

"Wait until to-morrow."

"I cannot," she said, hoarsely and unsteadily. "I have come a long distance—all the way from New York. Oh, sir, do not put anything in my way, now."

"What!" he cried out. "Are you from the North? Do you not know it is almost certain death to enter a place like this?"

"I care not—only let me see my husband."

Her desolate tone touched the man's heart. Something rose chokingly in his throat as he inquired:

"What is your husband's name?"

"Dudley Linton."

"Yes, such a person is here—in the lower ward."

She struck her hands together with a smothered cry.

"He is alive, then? Thank God! I felt all the while that I should see him again, that he would be spared until I could reach his side. Quick! do not delay me another minute."

"You can do him no good. He is in charge of the regular nurse."

"Let me take her place."

"He would not know you."

"I think he would. Only let me enter and look at him. Have you a wife?" she asked, suddenly. "How would you feel if she were ill, dying, and some one stood at the door of her chamber to shut you out?"

He drew a quick breath.

"Come," he said, hoarsely. "It may be wrong, but if it is God will forgive me. I can't resist your pleadings."

He unclosed a door, and she saw a long, low room with white cots ranged on either hand. The gas-jets burned dimly, shedding a ghastly light upon the scene. Leonie's eyes wandered wildly from cot to cot, searching for her husband.

"You will find him yonder, opposite the window," said the man.

She stole forward, panting and trembling, and stood beside the cot. One glance sufficed—it was Dudley, but oh, so altered! Scarce a trace left of the strong, handsome, *debonair* lover who had won her heart!

After a few moments, when he moved and moaned, she laid her hand, light as a snowflake, upon his forehead. A sort of galvanic quiver shook his frame; his lips moved.

"It is Leonie's hand," he muttered. "I know its soft, cool touch. Leonie's! Oh, my God!"

She thought he was sane, and had recognized her, but the words were a part of his delirium. When they were uttered he turned painfully away and seemed to sink into a sort of stupor.

The physician came presently and stood beside the cot. His quick eye had detected a strange face, and he looked anxious and troubled.

"This patient needs unusual care," he said. "This is the third day, and the crisis is past. He has a chance for recovery—a very slight one, 'tis true, but still it is a chance. A moment's neglect just at this juncture might prove fatal."

"You need not fear to trust me," said Leonie, very low.

"You look so young—so delicate. Do you feel equal to the emergency?"

"Yes," she replied; "I am his wife!"

The physician started, looked at her almost in terror, but finally passed on without another word. He felt that none was necessary.

Dudley would not be out of danger until after the eleventh day. That first night, as she knelt beside his cot, heard his groans, and listened to his incoherent utterances, Leonie prayed that God would take her own life, if necessary, but spare that of the man she loved so devotedly.

One afternoon, as she sat beside him bathing his forehead, his ravings suddenly ceased. A soft, tremulous sigh broke from his lips, and he caught her hand.

"This is Leonie's hand," he said, as he had done once before. "I know the touch of those slender, dimpled fingers. Leonie's! Ah, it is impossible. She is far away—I shall never see her again."

"No, she is here," Leonie said, trembling very much. "She has been with you for many days."

"No, no! It is a delusion. I have deserved nothing save contempt and neglect at her hands. Even an angel of mercy cannot forgive everything."

"She has forgiven. Believe it, Dudley, it is true."

"It can't be," he persisted. "I wronged her too cruelly. Never woman suffered as she suffered through my instrumentality. I merit only abhorrence."

"But she loves you in spite of everything. She never ceased to love you."

He shook his head sadly and sorrowfully.

"Do not try to deceive me. I have thought of her often during my exile, and wished I had been true to her. Sometimes I felt tempted to go to her and kneeling at her feet, sue for forgiveness. But she would not come to me, and of her own accord—never!"

"Try to understand," said Leonie, pressing her lips to his. "You have been very ill, and I could not remain away. It was no time to cherish resentment. You might die, and be lost to me forever. I only thought of your danger, and prayed for your recovery. I am here, and will never leave you again unless driven away."

She saw a perplexed expression cross his features, but after a moment's silence he pressed his hands upon his eyes and sighed heavily.

"No, no! Leonie! It can't be. She is far from here. I shall never see her again. Even an angel from heaven would not forgive such a wretch—how can she?"

The next day he awakened to a full consciousness of his surroundings. He had been lying very quiet for some time, and Leonie thought him sleeping until the sound of a suppressed sob caused her to look up. His eyes, glistening with tears, were bent upon her face.

"Oh, my love," he said, in a broken voice, "this is more than I deserve. You ought to hate me, and yet you are here! This it is to heap coals of fire upon one's head."

She drew nearer, and held fast to his trembling hands.

"Don't say another word," she murmured.

But he felt that he must speak; words of deepest contrition and sorrow were struggling for utterance.

"I am sane enough to realize what you have risked in coming here. The very atmosphere is infected. Oh, my poor injured darling, I have not deserved such goodness! Who was ever wronged as I have wronged you? It is a wonder that you can even endure my presence."

"Oh," she ejaculated, with a sound of bitter pain, "how little you have understood my love! It could endure a thousand-fold more than this, and remain unchanged."

"It was not in me to understand it," he groaned. "But I think I do now—I think I do now."

"If it but has its just reward at last, I am content."

As she leaned over him his arms weakly clasped her neck, and he laid his face close to hers a moment.

"Only forgive me," he said, in a whisper, "and if God spares my life I will atone."

Let us draw a veil over the scene that followed. Both had sinned and suffered—both had gone down into deep waters, and now, through the wonderful goodness of God, they were even to gather figs from the thistles they had planted. For them, as it were, the law of the universe had been reversed. Ah, how could they be thankful enough for so great mercies?

Of Richard Forsyth and Elsie it is only necessary to say that comfort and happiness now surround them. Miss Joanna took them home to her own stately mansion, and persists in heaping upon the young couple every luxury that wealth can command. Already, in the atmosphere of peace and plenty, has Richard's health been fully restored, and the hope beats high in his heart of one day being reckoned among the world's great painters.

It is a commendable ambition—and one that may yet be realized.

As soon as Dudley's health was fully restored, he and Leonie went abroad. Miss Joanna furnished the means necessary for the journey, but, even to the last, she resolutely refused to see her nephew.

"I forgive all the evil he has done," she said, "but it is better that we do not meet again. Tell him from me that my will is made—he might as well know it now as later. Two-thirds of my property I have left to Richard—the remaining third to Leonie, but not one dollar to himself. He will understand my reasons for this division without any explanation from me. I hope he has turned over a new leaf, and will be a better man for what has occurred."

Dudley knew he had deserved this, and even more. It was a part of his punishment. And yet, had Heaven meted out to him his just deserts, how much more terrible must have been his sufferings! He had had his opportunity and had wasted it. It was only God's wonderful goodness and mercy that left him with a single hope or comfort in life.

As Leonie had been given a handsome sum out of the Trevlyn estate, the young couple had no fear of privation to add to their distress.

The day Dudley and his wife left America, Geraldine went to the steamer to see them off. When the last farewell words were uttered, and she had turned to retrace her steps to the carriage, some one came up hastily from the crowd, and spoke her name.

It was Ray Armitage. Her eyes fell before his ardent gaze, and a beautiful color dyed her cheeks.

"Geraldine," he said, "I cannot see you go back to your desolate home without again speaking of the love I bear you. It has never changed—it never will."

She trembled, and caught her breath; but, something in her downcast looks caused him to draw nearer, and add, in a husky whisper:

"I can bear this suspense no longer. Search your own heart, darling, and tell me if the ashes of any other passion lie between us—if I must go on loving you in vain."

The scales had fallen from her eyes. She did not speak, but suddenly stretched out both hands, with a hushed, passionate cry, and leaned her head upon his shoulder.

That was her answer!

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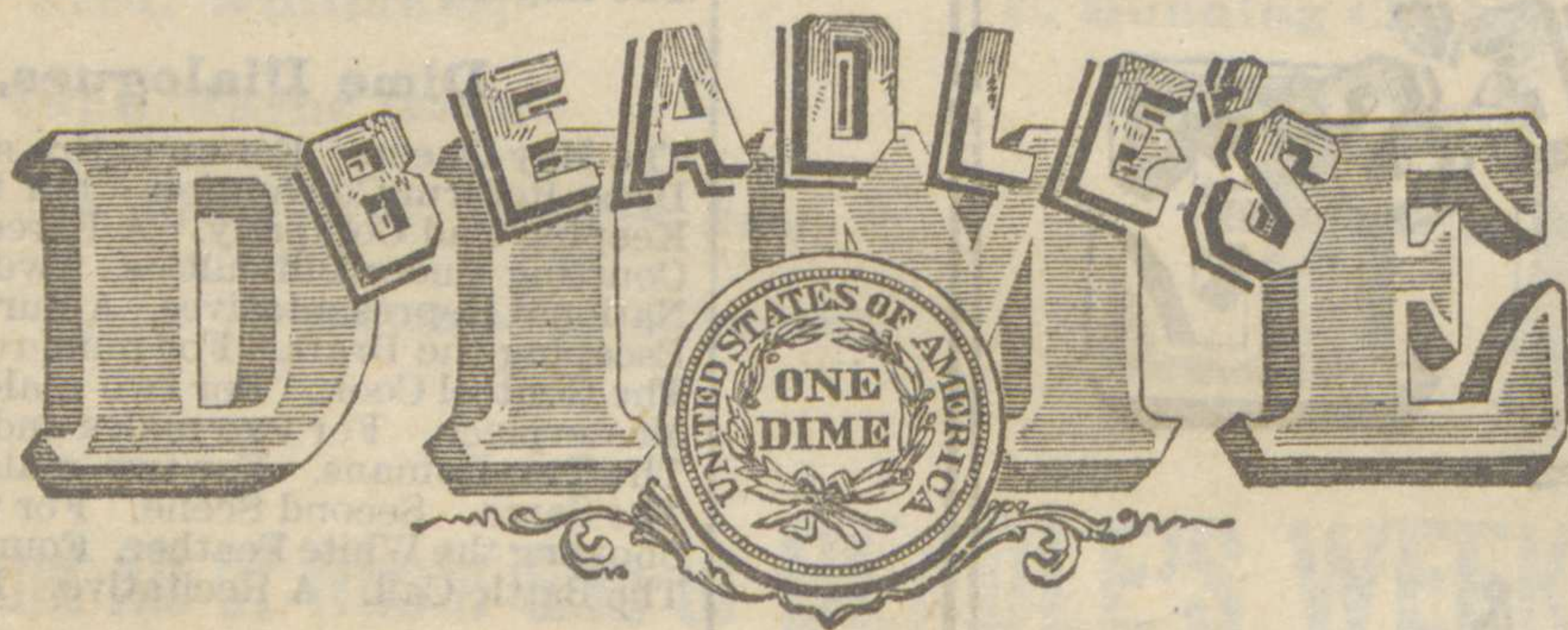
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